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February 22, 2026

## JUDGMENT COMING: MATTHEW 13:24-30,36-43

**Teacher's note:** This lesson is the one set aside by the Explore the Bible curriculum to be explicitly evangelistic. I want to use this lesson plan to help you provide some Evangelism Training for your group. You will, in effect, be leading an evangelism training seminar for your class. It will be a different lesson, with the AIM to DO TRAINING, not just to relay the content of the passage and apply it to your group members' lives. This is an experiment, let's see how it goes. (See Notes Box for Really Important Special Instructions for this lesson)

**Coteaching Instructions.** I would suggest that Facilitator 1 (the main teacher) lead the purple and blue areas and Facilitator 2 lead the orange areas.

### Introductory Activity

**Ask:** By a show of hands, how many of you know someone who does not know Jesus? (Allow time for them to raise their hands.)

**Say:** Now, picture one person who fits into that category.

**Instruct:** Don't raise your hand, but how many of you have shared the gospel with that person?

**Explain:** According to research from the Barna Research Group, data from 2025 reveal that only 1/3 of Christians feel it is their personal responsibility to share the gospel. Sharing the gospel can be intimidating or scary, so we do not do it as often as we should. Other times, we don't share because of our personality. Maybe you are not very good at talking to people in general, or not very good at talking to people about spiritual things. Other times, we don't share the gospel because we do not know how to do so.

**Summarize Transition:** Today, our lesson is going to be a little different. Each quarter, the Explore the Bible curriculum sets aside one lesson to be overtly evangelistic. In other words, the writers provide one lesson designed to help the leader of a small group share the gospel. Well, today we are going to turn that on its head a little. Instead of sharing the gospel with you outright, I want to use this lesson to teach you how to share the gospel with those you encounter. So, today's lesson might be a little different, but the goal of our time together is to equip you with the tools to share the gospel with that person you thought about earlier.

We are going to learn how we can share the gospel using one of Jesus parables found in Matthew 13. This parable is a story about a farmer who planted some wheat seed, but in the night, his enemy planted some weeds among his wheat. He did so to imperil the wheat harvest and out shear spite to the farmer. The farmer's workers discover the weeds after the plants begin to grow. They then ask the farmer if they should pull up the weeds. The farmer tells them no. They are to wait until the harvest and separate the two at that time. During the harvest, the wheat will be brought into the barn and the weeds burned.

This parable is a useful means of sharing the gospel. But it is also a helpful reminder for us to share the gospel with those we do not know. It reminds us of the judgment coming. It also reminds us of the patience of God. The ancient Christian theologian, Jerome, reminds us that this passage shows us that God's decision to allow the weeds and wheat to grow alongside one another shows that until the harvest there is always room for

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### Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Matthew* (Preaching)
- *New American Commentary: Matthew* (NAC)
- *Exalting Christ in Matthew* (Exalting)
- *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Matthew 1-13* (ACCS)
- *The King Has Come* (Spurgeon)

### NOTES ON TEACHING THE LESSON:

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR YOU ARE IN BLUE. WORDS YOU WILL SAY IN THE SMALL GROUP TIME ARE IN PURPLE. WORDS THAT YOUR GROUP WILL SAY WHEN THEY ARE SHARING THE GOSPEL ARE IN ORANGE.

repentance (cf. ACC, 278) Similarly Augustine encourages us with his words: “Let the one who is wheat persevere until the harvest; let those who are weeds be changed into wheat.” (ACC, 277) And finally, Jerome draws a distinction between the angels who will dispense the judgement at the final judgement and the believers who live today, represented by the workers in the parable. He writes, “They did what they were suited for and left it to the angels to do the separation.” (ACC, 277) So let’s learn how to do what we are suited for—persevering and sharing the gospel.

## 1. WHEAT OR WEEDS (MATT. 13:24-30) (DO NOT READ THE PASSAGE YET)

### STARTING THE EVANGELISTIC CONVERSATION

**Explain to your Small Group:** So, as you picture in your mind the person who does not know Jesus that we thought about before, I want you to consider: how would you even begin to share the gospel with them? Well, the context of this passage provides clues about how to open the conversation. You see, many in Jesus’ day believed that the Messiah would bring judgment. They thought He would immediately rid the world of evil and evil-doers. Some might have been wondering: if Jesus is the Messiah, why hasn’t He started ridding the world of evil? (cf. Exalting, 180) Similarly, many people in our world, believers and unbelievers alike, are concerned with evil in the world. Unbelievers might not view evil in the same way you do, but they do see evil and fret over it. I will give you an example. (TEACHER’S NOTE: IF YOU HAVE A SIMILAR EXAMPLE, SHARE YOURS. IF NOT, YOU CAN SHARE MINE AND SIMPLY PREFACE IT BY SAYING, “J TELLS THIS STORY.”) During one of my cross-country travels, I pulled into a hotel somewhere in West Texas, and this young man approached me in the lobby of the hotel. While we should not be too quick to judge, by all appearances and choice of language, this young man did not know Jesus. He engaged me in conversation and presented me with the perfect opportunity to share the gospel. I remember this event clearly because I look back with some regret. He gave me the opportunity, and I failed to take it. He began telling me a story about some horrific event that had taken place in their community. He went on to lament the great evil in this world. Now again, my definition of evil was probably much broader than his, but he clearly understood the concept of evil. I should have followed up His story with a question. *This is the same question you can use to begin the evangelistic conversation with your friend or family member.*

Notes:

REMEMBER YOU ARE LEADING AN EVANGELISM TRAINING WORKSHOP TODAY, NOT TEACHING THE LESSON OUTRIGHT. SO THINGS ARE GOING TO BE DIFFERENT.

**The question could be something like:** “Do you ever wonder why God allows evil to persist? Do you wonder why He doesn’t just rid the world of evil?”

If they answer affirmatively, you can then proceed with something like: “You know the people in Jesus’ day wondered the same thing. They were asking questions like, ‘Why doesn’t God just take out the evil people?’ Jesus answered them with a story.” This is when you get to today’s Bible passage. If the setting permits, you could read the passage, or you can tell the story from memory. If you tell the story from memory, you will want to begin by saying. “We can find Jesus’ story in Matthew 13.”

**Read (or have someone read) Matthew 13:24-30.**

**Explain:** After you read or tell the story. You can ask the person, “What do you think Jesus meant by that story?” After you ask the question, allow them time to answer. Their answer will guide how you move forward. If it appears they understand the story, you can move more quickly to the gospel. More probably, you will have to explain it.

You can explain that it is very simple on the surface. Then explain how Jesus used stories.

Jesus often used stories like this. We call them parables. The word parable means to lay something alongside something else. “These stories set an everyday occurrence (like farming) alongside a spiritual truth to illustrate the point.” (ETB LG, 142) On the surface, this story is simple. An experienced farmer plants some seed. An enemy came along and planted some weeds in the field. The workers asked if they should pull it up, and the farmer told them to wait until the harvest.

It’s a simple story, but it has a deeper meaning. When Jesus’ disciples heard the story, they really did not understand it, so they asked Jesus to explain it to them (v. 36). Do you want me to tell you what Jesus said the story means?

**Summarize Transition:** It’s a simple story, but it has a deeper meaning. When Jesus’ disciples heard the story, they really did not understand it. As believers, we can study Jesus’ explanation and “go deep” and understand all of the nuances. However, if we use this story to share the gospel, we will not want to dig too deep. We will keep our explanation simple and move toward the gospel.

## 2. JESUS AND THE DEVIL (MATT. 13:36-39) (DO NOT READ THE PASSAGE YET)

### USING THE CONVERSATION TO EXPLAIN SIN

**Explain:** If the other person agrees to allow you to explain the story, it is preferable to read the words of Jesus from your Bible (paper or electronic), but if you have to share the explanation from memory, that is ok (just make sure you have the facts straight in your head).

**Read** (or have someone read) Matthew 13:36-39.

**Explain:** After reading the passage to your friend, you can say, “What I love about this passage is that the disciples did not understand Jesus, so they asked Him to explain. I love that because I don’t always understand the Bible when I read it, but if I take time and examine Jesus’ words, I can understand. So, let’s break down the elements of the story:

First, we see that the farmer represents Jesus. He uses an Old Testament title, “Son of Man,” to refer to Himself. He had done that before. The disciples knew that He meant Himself.

Second, He says that the field is the world and includes all mankind.

Third, He explains that the wheat are the people in this world who follow Him, and the weeds are those who do not yet follow Him.

Finally, Jesus concludes that the enemy who sowed the bad seed is the devil, and the harvesters are God’s angels.

Now, that went from planting seeds in the dirt to the cosmic spiritual level pretty quickly, but let’s back up and talk about the seeds for a second. In

the story, there are two kinds of seeds: wheat seeds and weed seeds. One produces a crop that is useful and helpful to the farmer. The other produces something that is harmful. In the time of Jesus, there was a weed called darnel. On a quick glance, it looks like wheat. However, darnel is poisonous and carries a fungus that could infect the wheat crop (see ETBC, 129). So, Jesus is saying just like there are only two types of seed in the story, there are only two types of people in this world: those who follow Jesus and those who do not. We might think that the weeds, or people who do not follow Jesus, are obviously evil people or criminals. Some are, but weeds are not always so obvious. On the surface, those who follow Jesus and those who do not might look similar. Both might have jobs, take their kids to ball practice, vote, take care of ageing parents, and try to do the right thing. The story shows us that, like the wheat and weeds, both types of people go through life, grow, and do their thing alongside each other. However, the two groups will experience different outcomes in the end.

I said that this story went from the dirt to the cosmos pretty quickly. The reason the two groups of people will experience two different outcomes is because there is more to this world than we can see. Jesus points to this when He mentions the devil and angels. We can see the outward appearance of others, but there is something about humans that we can't see. Each of us has a spirit and soul as well, and our spiritual nature is what matters most. Remember, earlier I said that the darnel, the weeds, carried a fungus. It is diseased. The reality is that every person born carries a disease. We call this disease sin.

**Explain** to your class that at this point in the conversation, you have done a lot of talking. **You need to stop** and give them a chance to engage in the conversation. So, you are going to ask them a question. Stopping and asking the question does two things. First, it makes this a conversation, not a sermon. Second, you can gauge their response to the question to see where they are spiritually. Let's pick up with the question you should ask.

Ask: Have you heard that word "sin" before? Do you know what it means?

Explain to your group that after asking the question, they should give the other person some time to talk. A few things might happen at this point. (1) They might give you a biblically sound explanation of sin. (2) They might *not* give you a biblical explanation. If their explanation is not scriptural, do not break in to explain things at this point. Just let them talk. (3) They might ask some questions about what you have already said. Do your

Notes:

Possible questions the friend might ask:

**"Do you *really* believe in the Devil?"**: If your friend asks this question you can reply with something like, "I do. I think there is a lot in the world we do not understand, and a lot going on in the spiritual world we can't see. But when I look around at all the evil in the world, I know that there is something behind all of it. I truly believe there is a devil, and he is the author of sin. And sin comes in all types. Let's talk about that and see if we understand more about the devil. So, what do you think sin is?"

**"You said something about the end of the age? What do you mean?"**: Oh yes, I believe there is going to be a time when all of this comes to an end. The Bible teaches that. Jesus' story alludes to it, and He will talk more as He explains more. But at that time, there will be a judgment because of sin. How do you think God defines sin?"

best to answer them. If the questions are about things like the existence of the devil or the end times or whatever, you should do your best to answer and have a conversation, but try to bring the conversation back to the issue of sin. (Teacher, see the notes box. For ways a person can bring the conversation back to the initial question or sin.)

After giving the person time to answer the question related to sin. Ask them if you can give them a simple definition of sin.

If they give the go-ahead, you can say: There might be a technical or fancy way of explaining sin, but I like the one we use when talking to kids. Sin is anything you think, say, or do that offends God. You might ask, how can

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something offend God? Well, the Bible tells us that God is good and everything He does is good and righteous. The word we use for that is holy. God is holy.

(Teacher: Stop and acknowledge, depending on the person you are talking to, that explanation might elicit a negative response like: How can you say God is good? I have experienced XYZ in my life. Or, just look around at all the famine and war in the world. If you get that type of question, you can take them back to the story. You can say, "Think back to the wheat and the weeds growing in the story.

Remember, the farmer told his workers to leave them be. Let them grow side by side. Now the farmer kept doing his thing. He watered the plants. He might have even put some fertilizer on the field.

Nevertheless, the two grew side by side. They both experienced the storms and winds. The farmer did not ignore them when the storms came. In our lives, storms are the result of the sin that pervades our world. The farmer and his workers might have gone into the field to tend to the wheat after a storm. In the same way, God cares for His people in this world. Nevertheless, storms come because of sin."

God is holy. And in the Bible, He explains how to be holy. The Bible also tells us that every person alive fails to be holy. Romans 3:23 tells us, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." In reality, everyone starts out afflicted with the disease of sin. Earlier, I said that everything we think, say, or do that offends God is sin. And since God explains what goodness and sin are in the Bible, we have to ask what does it mean to "fall short." Let's take just a few examples from the Bible. In the book of Exodus, God explains that it is sinful to lie (even just a little bit) and steal (even just a little bit). Have you ever lied or stolen, even just a little bit, or as a young person? (Teacher, explain to your group that they should give the person a moment to either agree or to hem and haw. It's ok. Just let them and then say:) *Well, I know I have.* I don't like to admit it, but I know that I have done things that were wrong, and really, we all know that there are times in our lives when we have done wrong.

So, every person starts out life as a weed. I know Jesus said that some are weeds and some are wheat. That is true because some people recognize that they are weeds and do what is necessary to become wheat. But before we talk about that lets look back at Jesus' story and see what is going to happen to those who don't address their sin problem.

### **Summarize and Transition:**

Sharing the gospel using this parable will cause us to share the gospel a little differently than just going through a presentation like the Roman Road or The Three Circles. After explaining that everyone is sinful, we would normally move straight into the consequences of sin and Christ's answer to that problem. However, at this point, we have to go back to the story.

## **3. HEAVEN OR HELL (MATT. 13:40-43) (DON'T READ THE PASSAGE YET)**

### **USING THE CONVERSATION TO EXPLAIN JUDGEMENT**

**Explain** that group members sharing the gospel can either read the passage or can explain what it says if the situation does not allow for a moment to pull out the Bible.

**Read** (or have someone read) Matthew 13:40-43.

**Explain:** At this point of the conversation, you are going to explain the concepts of judgment and reward. Then you will draw the net using the final phrase of Jesus.

Ask: **What do you think that passage means?** (Teacher, explain that group members should allow their friend or family member to answer the question honestly. If they give a scriptural response that will eliminate the need for further explanation. If they do not, you can explain.)

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**Explain the passage:** Here, Jesus continues His explanation of the story. He reminds the disciples of the manner in which farmers dealt with wheat and weeds. At the appropriate time, the harvesters will go in with the tools and bring in the crop. As they go through the field, they will separate the wheat from the weeds. The wheat will be bundled together and brought into the farmer's barn. The weeds, on the other hand, will be taken away and burned. In Jesus' explanation, He says it is the same with those who follow Him and those who do not. Those who do not follow Him will face an eternity of judgment for their sin. Those who do follow Him will spend a joyful eternity in His presence. Again, the book of Romans helps us here. In chapter 6 verse 23, it says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." In other words, the reward for a sinful life is physical and spiritual death.

But we have to ask why the followers of Jesus experience a joyful outcome, and others suffer? The answer goes back to sin and our response to it. Earlier, I said that all of us are born as sinful people. Those who follow Jesus have addressed their sin. But you have probably experienced the same as me. No matter how hard you try, you can't suppress the impulse to sin. In reality, there is nothing we can do about our sin problem. That is why God sent Jesus. Romans again tells us in Romans 5:8 "But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Teacher, direct the group member who is sharing with their friend to stop and ask them, "What do you think this means?"

### USING THE CONVERSATION TO EXPLAIN REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION

At this point, explain that the group member should tell their friend or family member that Jesus came and lived a perfect life. He never sinned, and then He offered Himself as a willing sacrifice for our sins. Since Jesus had never sinned, He was the perfect sacrifice. Through Him, we can experience the transformation from weeds to wheat. After they explain this, they should draw their friend back to Jesus' words at the end of verse 43.

**Tell your friend:** At the end of verse 43, Jesus says, "Let anyone who has ears listen." He is telling His disciples and us that this is important, and we should not only hear but respond. The Bible tells us that the way we respond to Jesus' teaching about our sin is to "confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead" (Romans 10:9). A person must admit to God that he or she is a sinner and desires to turn away from that sin. We call this repentance. Then he or she must confess that Jesus is their Lord. This means that they desire to put God in charge of their life. This is only possible because Jesus died on the cross in our place and rose again.

**Explain:** At this point, the group member sharing the gospel must ask something like, "Would you like to do that today?" If they answer in the affirmative, the group member should then lead them in a short prayer of repentance and confession that Jesus is Lord of their lives.

### CONCLUDE

Using this passage is not the most efficient or expedient way of sharing the gospel. But it can be a way to talk with someone who might be willing to have an extended conversation. Going through the story over a cup of coffee or in a person's living room will afford you the time to share.

But we can't end today's lesson with a reminder that someone in the room might not have repented of sin and made Jesus Lord of their life. If you haven't, you can do so today. Just because we hang out with wheat does not mean we have addressed our sin problem. If any of you have questions about the story or what it means to follow Jesus, I encourage you to talk with a pastor or me today.

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**Close in Prayer**