

“Kingdom Secrets: The Weeds”
Matthew 13:24-30, 34-43

January 10, 2021

SI: None of us like to be left in the dark.

We all want to know what’s going on, and we especially love it when we have the inside scoop. That’s what Jesus’ parables are.

They are the inside scoop about the kingdom of God.

Matthew 13:11 is my touchstone verse for this sermon series on Jesus’ parables. His disciples asked him why he taught in parables to the crowds but only explained the meaning of the parables to them.

Jesus replied, The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.

So the primary purpose of the parables is to tell followers of Jesus Christ what to expect about God’s kingdom in this world.

What is the reign of God in the world through Jesus Christ going to be like?

How will it progress? What it will become in the future.

INTRO: I've told you this before, so you may remember it.

A number of years ago I met a very devout Christian man who told me how he became a Christian.

What happened was that as a young man, he was drafted and sent to Vietnam.

He wasn't a believer, but he saw such horrible things that he realized there had to be a God. There had to be a God who would deal with evil and set things right.

He began to pray, even though he didn't know God.

And shortly after that he met a believer who told him about Jesus Christ.

The reason his story made an impact on me was that just a day or two before our conversation, I had read an article by a man who was an atheist.

He said that his atheism began when he was a soldier in Vietnam.

He saw such suffering that he came to the conclusion that there cannot be a God.

Because if there was a God, he would not allow such things to happen.

I thought at the time: Isn't that fascinating!

Two men confronted with the evils of war.

One concluded there is no God.

There is no supreme Judge who will set things right.

The other man came to the opposite conclusion.

There must be a God, and he must be good.

And he will one day judge evil through the man he has appointed, Jesus Christ.

You don't have to go to war to be confronted with evil.

It's plain to see that something is wrong.

Even though there is much goodness and beauty still in creation—

it's broken by sickness and death and the horrible things people do to each other.

Everyone, at some point in their lives, will wrestle with the deep questions:

Why is there evil? If God is good and powerful, why doesn't he do something?

There is that phrase in 2 Thessalonians, "the mystery of iniquity."

And indeed evil does raise some of the most perplexing questions.

That's what this parable is about. Jesus second kingdom parable is about evil.

You might say his first parable, the parable of the sower, is an overview of

how the kingdom of God grows and progresses in this present age.

The second parable, the parable of the weeds, is an overview of evil opposition to the kingdom of heaven and how God handles it.

You might even say this second parable is about a rival kingdom, a kingdom of evil, that is opposed to all that Jesus is doing in this world.

In order to live as an effective citizen in God's kingdom, it's important for you

to know about this other kingdom, because your understanding of evil, your response to it, can drive you to God, or away from him.

So let's look at what our Lord says about evil and the kingdom of heaven. For you note-takers, notice that his parable is like a 3 act play.

Three acts correspond to the three truths Christ reveals.

Act I The Sowing

Act II The Growing

Act III The Mowing

Let's look at each.

Act I The Sowing

Jesus said: “A man sowed good seed in his field.”

He tells us that he is the sower. The sower is the Son of Man.

The seeds are the children of the kingdom.

But, Jesus says, there is another sowing that goes on.

“But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat.”

The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the weeds are the sons of the evil one.

The servants saw the weeds and they said to themselves, this is no accident.

There’s something wrong here. Our master didn’t do this. Come to him and ask: “Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?”

And what is his answer to them? “An enemy has done this.”

Lord, why is there evil in the world?

God, if you are the all-good, all-powerful, all-seeing Master of this world.

If you have created it, and as the farmer in the parable, you tend it, why evil?

Why is there sickness and suffering and hatred and meanness and death?

That’s the question that the servants of the Master ask.

And it’s one of the most troubling of all questions—

especially when you are faced with evil, or when you see others suffering.

Jesus’ answer, and the answer found throughout Scripture is:

“An enemy did this—the enemy is the Devil.”

There is a personal, supernatural, evil being, called the Devil.

He sows evil in the world. That evil is most clearly seen in the hearts of men.

These men are sons of the evil one.

From the very beginning of the Bible, this is the explanation given for evil.

In the Garden of Eden, God’s perfect creation, Adam and Eve in harmony,

The serpent comes, tempts them to eat the forbidden fruit, and evil enters.

The Bible never presents evil as an impersonal force. It’s always personal.

It’s from the Devil—a spiritual being older, stronger, more intelligent than man.

When God created universe, two orders of intelligent beings—men and angels

We know that there was a fall, a rebellion, in the angelic realm.

Those fallen angels called demons, evil spirits.

Their leader is the Devil or Satan.

Jesus makes clear in this parable that the source of the evil we see in the world, and especially the control it has over the hearts and lives of men,

is from the enemy, the devil. He has sown seeds of evil in God’s good world.

There are two important applications from this teaching:

1. You must be satisfied with Jesus' answer.

For many people, even for some Christians, this is not a satisfying answer. In fact, they say, Jesus' answer is not an answer at all.

Because the only thing this answer does is push it back one more step.

Why is there evil? The devil. OK, well, why is there a devil?

If God is good, and he made the angels all good, then where did evil come from? And if God is sovereign and eternal and his divine decrees determine all things—then why did he even create that angel who would become the Devil?

Some have gone so far as to deny God is sovereign.

And to say that evil was somehow a surprise to God or outside of his control.

They feel like that is the only way they can preserve God's goodness.

There is certainly nothing wrong with asking that deeper question:

If God is all good and all powerful and all knowing, then why is there evil at all? But the reply of the Bible is: "The secret things belong to God and the things revealed belong to us and our children to walk in them."

Or, "Our God is in the heavens, He does whatever He pleases."

Tying to push beyond that, see secret counsels of God is futile.

The point is this, if Jesus had wanted to give another explanation, he would have.

Instead he said, Are you troubled by the presence of evil? There is a Devil.

In that answer, he has given us something very practical. Second application.

2. You must see that evil in the world is a spiritual problem, so it will take a spiritual solution.

The Jews who heard Jesus believed their problem was strictly political.

Roman oppression. So they wanted a Messiah who would bring political solution. Many people today think their biggest problem is psychological.

If only I could get things right in my psyche and emotions—messed up childhood, then things in my life would be right. Or it might be financial, or relational.

The Christian sees that all of those play a role but also sees that brokenness and suffering and evil are deeper than politics, economics, and psychology.

There is an enemy sowing seeds of evil. Evil ultimately has a spiritual dimension.

And God is going to deal with it. That's our hope.

Act II The Growing

The Devil sows evil in the world. It takes root in hearts of men and women.

It spoils things. It ruins things.
So the servants ask the Master: Do you want us to go and pull the weeds up?
Surely you do, Lord. You can't allow these seeds of evil to stay in your field.
What was Jesus answer? Leave them alone.
Let them grow together until the harvest. Why?!

There was a debate in the third century that split the church.
The issue was over how the church should treat professing Christians who
caved in to persecution and denied Christ to save their lives.
But then when the persecution was over, they said they were sorry and
wanted back in the church.
There was a party in the church called the Donatists who said that they cannot
be re-admitted because by denying their faith, they have proved to be false.
If they are allowed in, then that will be letting in people who aren't Christians
and we will no longer have a pure church.

St. Augustine argued that if these people gave evidence of repentance, then they
should be received back into the church.
And one of his arguments was this parable.
He said that yes, there might be some people who want back in the church who
are false disciples, and they are responding out of regret or some other motive.
But there are bound to be others who are genuinely repentant.
If we keep them all out because of concern for a pure church, we will do just
what Jesus said not to do, pull up the tender wheat with the weeds.
Eventually Augustine won. Those who denied the faith during persecution but who
repented and reaffirmed their faith were allowed to take Communion.

Augustine recognized that in this parable Christ is teaching his followers the
importance of patience.
Lord, why aren't you doing something about evil? We ask him.
I am, he says. But not all at once. Because if I destroy all evil now, I will destroy
people I'm planning to save. So for a time, you are going to have to be patient.
Jesus came to destroy sin and death and the power of the Devil.
But in order to do that in such a way that he also saves the elects and restores
creation, he has to work it out through history. And that takes time.
It takes years for men and women to be brought into the kingdom, years to mature.
Look beyond individuals to nations. Kingdom growth takes generations.
So far it's been 2,000 years since the ascension of Jesus Christ.
There are times and places where it looks like the kingdom of the Devil is winning.
But Kingdom of God growing and maturing. Why is God patient?

Because he is not willing that any should perish, but all come to salvation. So he's not going to wipe out evil till he achieves the full victory he has planned.

Once when Jesus was going through Samaria, he was treated disrespectfully in one of the villages. Do you remember what the disciples asked him?

“Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven and destroy them?”

And Jesus rebuked them. Because now is not the time to wipe out evil.

Instead he told them to be his witnesses in Samaria.

The application is that you must be patient as Christ is patient.

A Christian a person of incredible patience and stability.

He's not a zealot, expecting change tomorrow, condemning people, churches.

He's not a pessimist. Saying this is hopeless. Writing people off.

Christians believe in the slow and steady growth of the kingdom.

Like a farmer we should not overly excited about what appears to be a good crop.

And not overly alarmed at bad weather or even a crop failure.

Jesus is not saying, Don't fight evil. Of course Christians have to fight evil.

But his point is—Be patient. God is at work. This is the growing time.

Be patient with people: Spiritual growth and change don't happen overnight.

Look for evidences of spiritual life, pray for them, nurture them.

remember that Christ is patient with you.

Be especially patient with people in your family and your church.

Be patient with the structures of the world:

Political, civic, business, economic, cultural structures do have evil in them.

Christians see that evil and sometimes hope for a quick change.

If only we have a good election, get the right people in charge.

That's what the disciples thought too. But Jesus says—be patient.

Don't put your hopes in quick fixes for evil.

Certainly work for justice in all of those structures—

but know that your hope is the slow growth of the kingdom of God.

Be patient with yourself. Aren't you glad God is patient with you?

When you see evil in yourself, old habits and attitudes, and you say,

Lord, I want to change tomorrow—remember, it doesn't usually happen that way.

You grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ over a lifetime.

Act III The Mowing

Lord, why is there evil in your kingdom? The Devil did this.

Lord, why don't you do something about evil? Be patient. I am

Lord, what is your plan for dealing with evil? There is going to be a harvest.
“The harvest is the end of the age.”

The age Jesus is talking about is this age. This unique time we are living in between Jesus first coming in humility and his second coming in glory. It's sometimes called the Gospel Age, the Age of Grace.

The Resurrection power of Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit are in the world. The kingdom of God is growing. And so is the kingdom of Satan. Side by side, the wheat and the weeds.

But it won't always be like that.

In God's timing this age of grace and growing will end. And there will be a mowing. A harvest.

All people, the quick and the dead, will be gathered before Him. And there will be a great separation, the weeds for burning, the wheat for storing.

The Day of Judgment will be for some a great and glorious day.

“The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

For others “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

And this is when you have to ask the most important question about evil.

What about the evil in my own heart? Has it been dealt with?

When the mowing happens, will I shine like the sun in the kingdom of my Father, or will I be weeping and gnashing my teeth?

If you grew up with the King James Version, you know this Parable as the Wheat and the Tares. Modern translations say weeds, but tares is a more accurate word. Because a tare is not just any weed, it's a weed that looks like wheat.

That's why the farmer can't pull it out. Because it looks so much alike.

You can only tell at the end when it is fully grown, because it produces no grain. One of the strategies of the Devil is to plant people who look like Christians.

People who live by Christian principles, decent people, moral people. They consider themselves Christians but the aren't born again.

The Devil plants them in the church. They can be anywhere.

There's an old saying:

“When you look for the devil, don't forget to look in the pulpit.”

So what is the difference? How do you know if you are wheat or tares?

Real Christians are planted by Christ

Sons of the kingdom, have been born again by the work of the Holy Spirit. The outside power of God came into your life, and opened spiritual eyes to truth. There may have been times you tried to straighten out your life,

but this is completely different. It's the miracle of new mind and new life.
A real Christian knows it's only by the grace of God am I forgiven and made new.
I'm a miracle. The only explanation for who I am, and what I have become,
is the power of God. One proof you are a Christian, you are amazed at yourself.

And not only are real Christians planted by Christ,
they grow into the likeness of Christ. They produce fruit.
The counterfeit moral person does not. He does not grow in this way.
So a Christian grows. You might not grow as much as you want, but do grow.
We could say many things about growth, but comes down to two things.

You grow in your awareness of your sins. See more and more evil in own heart.
This is a universal experience of true Christians.

Take a peek into the private lives of great men and women of God,
and you see people growing in awareness of their sinfulness.

As Paul says: I am the chief of sinners.

But as a Christian, you are simultaneously growing in your assurance of God the
Father's love for you. The self-perception of the Christian is unique.

The more clearly I see my sinful nature, the more loved I know I am by God.
So you find yourself getting humbler and feeling more loved and confident.

You may hear this and say: I'm afraid I may be counterfeit.

I've confused a moral life and religion with the real life of God.

Praise God if you feel that way. You are waking up.

The seed is going in deep. Nail it down today.

You enter the kingdom by repentance and faith.

This morning. Before you come to the Table, before conviction passes,

Repent of your sins. Ask God's forgiveness through Christ.

And then trust Jesus. Plead with him to save you—and he will.

Pray, Lord Jesus, forgive my sins and save me. I give myself to you.

Come into my heart.

Give yourself to Christ now,

so that you will not stand before him in judgment later.

Now is age of grace.

The Lord is even now holding back his harvesting angels.

They are eager to gather the tares for burning and the wheat for the barn.

Book of Revelation tells us the martyrs in heaven are saying:

Lord, how much longer till judgment, when you wipe out evil forever.

He replies: Be patient. Wait a little longer. I have people to save.

Don't dely. Now is the day of grace. Give your life to Jesus—
and you will shine like the sun in the kingdom of your Father.