

The Wheat and the Weeds

Scripture Text: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Introduction

How do you respond to the presence of evil in the world? Do you sometime wonder where is God when bad things happen? We certainly cannot deny that evil exists. A quick look at the news on any day of the week will reveal how bad things are and show the depth of man's depravity. I can imagine that this sometimes will cause the faithful to wonder about God's purposes? That is sort of the situation we face with today's parable: Why evil exists in God's creation. This parable is another one of the "Kingdom parables" where Jesus is describing what the Kingdom of God is like. Last week, we looked at Mark's account of the Parable of the Soils. This week we are looking at Matthew's account of the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds. This parable flows well from the one about the soils as it has some of the same elements but with a different message.

In the Parable of the Soils Jesus described the Kingdom of God as four types of soil (hard, rocky, thorny, and good) with the same kind of seed in each. In the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds, however, Jesus speaks of two different kinds of seed that is sown by two different individuals, a farmer and his enemy. Maybe you have experienced a situation like that of the farmer and his enemy. Perhaps you have spent time tilling the ground, fertilizing the soil of your garden, planting good seed in it, and expecting a good crop to grow only to find later that weeds have grown up amongst your crop. I can imagine that it is a bit disappointing. Think about how God must feel to work hard on creating all of this, which was "very good," only to have it wrecked and thrown into frustration and futility by the enemy. Imagine how Jesus must feel to have died on a cross to pay our debt, to be resurrected from the grave to give us new life, to empower His people (the Church) with the Holy Spirit in order to be His witnesses throughout the world, and then have the enemy come in and sow seeds of discord, disunity, and unfaithfulness among His people. How must God feel?

Well, that can hopefully put into perspective what this parable is saying. God is at work growing His kingdom with good seed, followers of Jesus Christ. At the same time, the enemy, Satan, is planting his followers who on the surface may appear to be God's people, but inwardly are ravenous wolves that seek to destroy God's work. Jesus' parable about the Wheat and the Weeds is to warn us about the works of the Devil. As mentioned before, there are some similarities to the Parable of the Soils, but there are also some differences. For instance:

- The Sower is Jesus, as was in the other parable.
- The seed are people, whereas before it was the Word of God.
- The good seed are those who follow Jesus, like the good soil.
- The bad seed are weeds (or tares in some translations) who are those sown by Satan and who reject Jesus (like the bad soils).

- The harvest is when Christ gathers His people at the end of the age, like the good soil that becomes very fruitful.

Instead of speaking about people who do and do not bear fruit, this second parable tells us about the destinies of two groups of people (everlasting life vs. everlasting punishment). It tells us of two different qualities (lawlessness vs. righteousness). And it tells of two “sowers,” Jesus who is growing disciples of Him in the world and Satan who is sowing evil followers that disrupt God's work. The main message seems to be that the good seed of God, the Church, must not be discouraged as we co-exist with the evil seed of Satan. We are to patiently wait for the pay day and harvest at the end of the age. We need to remember:

- The Kingdom is Growing
- The Enemy is Sowing
- A Pay Day is Coming

The Kingdom is Growing

One thing we ought to realize with this parable is that God is sowing good seed in the world. When things appear to be bad, when situations in the world are not good, when God's own Church is having problems, the good news is that God is sowing good seed. Jesus began this parable by saying the following:

Matthew 13:24 *He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.”*

Jesus explained that the good seed are the “sons of the Kingdom,” those who accept and follow Jesus Christ. The field is the world where the good news of Jesus Christ is changing lives and growing the Church. We should celebrate this, that God is planting good seed and His Kingdom is fruitful. Jesus died for the Church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against Her. God also expects His people to participate in the Kingdom growth by making more disciples of Jesus Christ. God's Kingdom is growing.

The Enemy of Sowing

However, the parable is about the evil that happens while God is sowing good seed in the world. James Montgomery Boice wrote the following:

“Nothing good has come into this world without opposition, and that is especially true of spiritual matters.”

That statement is so true. If something good happens, you can bet that there will be someone who will oppose it or have something negative to say about it. When the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) returned to its conservative roots and embraced the radical idea that the Bible is indeed the Word of God, many had

negative things to say about that. To be fair, there were folks on both sides of the debate that were hurt by un-Christ-like actions, but, I think it is a good thing to embrace the Bible as authoritative, relevant, and truthful for God's people. Many thought that it would be the end of the SBC. Many thought the seminaries that train young men and women to lead God's church and reach the world for Jesus Christ would probably have to close their doors. But visit the seminary in Wake Forest today and you will see it is thriving. In the years following the "conservative resurgence," or "conservative takeover" as some are fond of calling it, the seminary was marked by a season of growth. Naysayers will try to sow seeds of discord and negativity in what is good.

That is true for God's Kingdom. Jesus described that while He is sowing good seed in the world, the enemy is at work attempting to destroy God's harvest. In the parable, Jesus described Satan as sowing weed among God's wheat. The weed, also called "tares," was particularly undesirable, possessed a seed which was poisonous, and it was often hard to detect as it resembled the wheat. Jesus' parable was based on reality as the Romans outlawed someone sowing weeds in another's field. So, if the world is God's field and He is sowing good people for His Kingdom, why does He allow Satan to sow bad seed there. Put another way, why does God allow evil and suffering in the world if He wants to grow His Kingdom? Satan mixes counterfeit Christians among the real ones. Satan scatters unbelievers among God's believers. Jesus gave us a warning, that the bad seed is there. The Devil is going to bring false Christians that look so much like the real thing that Jesus' true disciples will not be able to tell. And these false disciples will cause problems for the Church and the Gospel.

And this is not just in the world, although it would be nice if it was the only place counterfeit Christians were found. Satan sows His tares in the Church, too. In fact, that is one reason why some people do not come to church: it's hard to tell the believers from the unbelievers. We have to be careful here, though. Just because someone is acting un-Christ-like does not mean they are an unbeliever. It might mean that, but not always. Just because you accept Jesus Christ does not automatically mean you behave perfectly from now on. What this parable means for us is that we should be aware that there are some who are not really of us. Sometimes, we will recognize them.

Matthew 7:15-16 ¹⁵ *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.* ¹⁶ *You will recognize them by their fruits.*

However, the mixed nature of the Church is no excuse for people to not come to Christ or to join His Church. Yes, the Church is full of hypocrites...and it has room for a few more. No one is perfect! If you are waiting for the perfect conditions for a church before making a decision to join it, then you will always be waiting. Satan is at work, and probably more so in the Church.

A Pay Day is Coming

The third point of this parable is that although God sows the good seed in His field (the wheat) and the enemy comes behind Him and sows bad seed (the weeds), we are to patiently wait for God to gather His children. God will gather the weeds from among the harvest. The late Dr. R. G. Lee called this “Pay day, Someday.” One day, God will purge His creation of all evil through the judgement and re-creation of the universe. Those who rejected Jesus and became the bad seed of Satan will face eternal punishment while those who accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, will be gathered together for everlasting life. Because God’s people are sometimes outwardly hard to distinguish from His enemies, Jesus warned us to wait for the final judgment. There will be a pay day, someday, but God is graciously delaying the “reaping,” to give people more time to repent.

What does this mean for the Church right now? Are we to do nothing about evil in our midst? Are we supposed to do nothing about sin in the Church? I don’t think so. For one, Jesus stated that the field is the world, not the Church. But even if we were to apply this to the Church, as we know Satan sows discord in the Church, too, Jesus gave us a process in Matthew chapter eighteen to discipline church members who fall into sin. Paul also wrote to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 5:6–7 ⁶ *Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?* ⁷ *Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened.*

Paul’s point was that a little sin becomes a big problem in the Church. The Church is God’s holy people called by Him into fellowship with Jesus Christ. While we can make no judgements on the eternal destination for people, we are called by God to maintain purity and as such must purge evil from within us.

Conclusion

In closing, are you sometimes discouraged by the evil in this world, wondering why God allows it? Do you sometimes wonder why God allows the weeds to grow among the wheat in His field? Maybe you are discouraged by seeing people who should be following Jesus Christ but seem to be at best negative to the things of Christ and at worst disruptive to the Church. Maybe you come to church week after week, or go home to your family day after day expecting peace and good things, and are faced with weeds growing among the wheat. Maybe a better way to look at this, though, is to realize that with Satan at work, we ought to be surprised that there is any good in the world at all. If it were not for God’s grace, we would only see evil, for *no one is good*.

But, God has a plan and we must remain faithful to Him and trust Him to fix creation. Ever since the Fall of Adam and Eve, all of creation has been subjected to futility and the evil devices of Satan. God is restoring His creation, but the

enemy is also working hard, while he has time, to destroy what God has made good. The good news is that Jesus Christ has already defeated Satan. With the cross, our debt of sin has been paid and with the resurrection, the curse of death has been eliminated. All one must do is claim the victory by believing in Jesus Christ as Savior and submitting to Him as Lord.

But this parable also forces us to evaluate where we stand. Like the Parable of the Soils, we need to examine ourselves to determine if we are the wheat or if we are the weeds. Do you show evidence of God's wheat (good seed sown in good soil) or Satan's weeds (bad seed sown by God's enemy)? Are you living for the purposes of God or for the purposes of Satan? Take a hard look at your life and see what fruit you are bearing. Is it good? Do you look like other Christians because you go to church every Sunday, maybe pay your tithes and offerings like other Christians should be doing, playing the part of a Christian, but inwardly you are really a bad seed sown in God's field? Are you just paying lip service to God, uncommitted to Him and to the things of God, or are you genuinely saved by God's grace and trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation?

We learn from this parable that God will permit the righteous and wicked to coexist for a while but that he will eventually separate the wicked, judge them, and punish them. We also learn that God will gather His people one day to be rewarded with everlasting life and peace where they will enjoy God's presence forever. If you have not turned to Jesus Christ, then I encourage you to turn to Him today. Ask Him to soften your heart, or better yet, to replace your heart of stone with a heart of flesh. Turn to Jesus Christ? Believe in Him as your Savior and serve Him as your Lord. If you have accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, but are not living for Him as you should, then repent, turn to Jesus, and ask Him to make you a fruitful child of God and not a tool of Satan. Do not let Satan use you as a weed in God's field, but turn to Christ and let the Holy Spirit grow you into a tall stalk of good wheat that will be harvested into everlasting glory. This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!