

Weeds in the Wheat Field

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

I have never been very good at growing grass. I have done a lot of yard work on several of the houses in which we have lived, but I have seen little to no success in growing nice, healthy green grass. That became quite a problem when we lived in Atlanta, because grass in the front yard was one of the few requirements that our homeowners association tried to enforce. So I remember getting written up and notified in writing about my weeds. Even hiring a professional yard service proved to be a failure. No matter what I did, how often I replanted or reseeded the lawn, I could not separate the weeds from the grass. Thankfully, where we live now, just a green ground cover is sufficient. There is no outside inspection. The weeds just blend right in and, actually, it looks pretty good on most of the yard.

But it was a problem in Atlanta, and it is a problem in our text this afternoon. Weeds. But in the parable today, it wasn't just a lawn, but a field to be harvested, a wheat field. Weeds in the wheat field. And that's the basic point of the parable before us this morning.

Weeds in the wheat field. That's the main idea, though the translation "weeds" isn't actually quite strong enough. Tares is the older English translation. The idea is of a particularly troublesome weed that actually resembles the grain. So the difficulty getting rid of it lies in that it is hard to detect, and hard to separate from the wheat. And it is pervasive.

A wheat farmer has few options available to him beside the one described in this parable. They didn't have a targeted weed killer like we have today that would not harm the wheat. So the farmer had to leave the tares alone until the harvest. Leave the

weeds be, for the time being, because the attempt to separate them out now will cause more damage to the wheat than the damage caused by their presence. If you go into the wheat field in order to do some weeding, you will trample on some of the wheat! No doubt the roots of the wheat and the tares are so intertwined also, that if you attempted to pull up the weeds, you would end up pulling up wheat along with it.

That's the illustration. And the main point of the parable rises to the surface quite clearly as well. It is a kingdom parable, a parable which describes, even defines, the kingdom of God throughout this age. The kingdom is illustrated by a wheat field that also contains weeds.

Thus the ever-present conflict, the conflict between good and evil. Ultimately, it is the conflict between Jesus and Satan. It is the fulfillment of the conflict defined by God when he cursed Adam and Eve for the guilt of their original sin. God declared to the serpent, the manifestation of Satan himself,

Gen. 3:15 "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

So there will be enmity between Jesus, the seed of the woman, and the devil. There would be warfare. An unreconcilable conflict. And it would continue throughout the whole of this age, until the end of the age when Jesus returns. The presence of the weeds would continue until the end of the age.

If you are interested in the whole subject of views of the millennium, this parable comes into discussion even as a defense of the postmillennialism system, noting the prominence of the wheat field. There are weeds, or tares, to be sure, but the wheat

field flourishes. I don't think you can prove the postmillennial expectation of a golden age of the earthly kingdom of Christ from that, but I do appreciate the emphasis. The kingdom of God is a wheat field. The whole world is that wheat field. And the wheat will grow until the harvest. The kingdom will grow, to every nation of the world! It will be successful and prosper, and Jesus will build his church. But there will still be conflict until the very end.

Now, that perspective answers a lot of questions about life, doesn't it? And solves a lot of problems. Like, why does God allow evil? Why do evil men sometimes succeed, even often? Why do the righteous so often suffer, making it seem as if God doesn't listen or even care? The broad picture of this parable answers those often difficult theological questions. Why doesn't God intervene when evil seems to triumph? Why doesn't God defend himself, or his people? Why is the church so often oppressed?

All those questions are addressed by the explanation of this parable,

v.27-30

With that broad perspective, then, let's begin with a more thorough analysis of this parable. First, obviously, the description of,

I. SOWING THE GOOD SEED.

In other words, preaching the gospel.

v.24

Again, thankfully, we have an inspired interpretation and explanation.

v.36-38

The straightforward explanation is simple: Jesus is the sower. The good seed are Christians, those whom Matthew identifies as "sons of the kingdom." Believers. Or with a more theological definition, the elect. Those who will be saved. Those who are saved.

So let me start with this main idea, that,

A. The kingdom of God will spread throughout the whole world.

Verse 38, "the field is the world." So the focus of the kingdom of God is the whole world. That, of course, is the big change from the Old Testament to the New. The kingdom of God is no longer associated with just one nation, but every nation is represented. Every nation is part of that wheat field. Including North Korea. And China, Iran, Pakistan. And the United States of America.

There is no sense of nationalism when it comes to a right understanding of the kingdom of God. There is no real sense of Christian nationalism. The kingdom of God is not attached to any nation. There are no longer any ethnic markers. What matters in the kingdom of God is Jesus, and the gospel of the kingdom is the seed that is sown in the whole world, bearing fruit everywhere.

So we have a commitment to world missions as a church. We support missionaries who proclaim the kingdom throughout the world, and that worldwide witness is an essential and fundamental aspect of our identity. Seeking to spread the kingdom throughout the world is our commission as a church,

Mat. 28:18 "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20

teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

People of God, “the field is the world.” That’s why we are part of a church that goes to the world. And we look forward to finding the “good seed” in every place, every nation. Where we go in the world, we expect to find “sons of the kingdom.” And we will continue to do so “to the end of the age. Because,

B. Jesus will build his kingdom throughout this whole age.

v.37

He is already king. He already reigns. He sits at God’s right hand and will continue to do so until he has put all his enemies under his feet. And so the Father says to his son,

Psalm 2:8 “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”

Jesus will triumph! The world is Jesus’ mission field. It is a wheat field. And the wheat will continue to grow throughout the whole of this age, the sons of the kingdom will continue to be born. Christians shall increase and increase. But, I must hasten to add, there will be opposition. There will be,

II. THE PRESENCE OF WEEDS.

Just as sure as the wheat will triumph, the weeds will make themselves known. Just as sure as the gospel of Jesus will triumph, the enemies of the gospel will make themselves known.

Now, I say this for your encouragement, because sometimes we get a much too short-sighted perspective on this world. We

look at our own experiences, limited as they are. We look at the experiences of our own country, especially in the past 75 years or so. We look at the trouble spots around the world, and there are plenty of them, to be sure! There always are. We see the weeds, as quickly and as easily as that company in Atlanta which my homeowners association hired to inspect all the lawns in my neighborhood. The weeds are easy to find. Their presence is undeniable, and, often, downright bothersome.

These words are explicit, in identifying,

A. The reality of a personal enemy.

v.38b-39 “...the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil.”

I mentioned Genesis 3:15 at the outset, the first reference to the saving, redemptive work of Jesus. But also the definition of the ongoing battle between good and evil. It is a personalized battle. And there will be enmity, enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. Enmity between the Devil and Jesus. Enmity between the sons of the Devil and the followers of Jesus, between the weeds and the wheat. It is a personal enmity! And a fierce war.

Look again at the language of the parable itself,

v.25

Clever, in an evil sort of way, isn’t it? The Bible talks about Satan’s wiles, his schemes. Satan is represented by the enemies of the owner of the wheat field coming in at night and sowing the weeds secretly. That’s what Satan does, isn’t it? This is what we know about him, with a warning,

1 Peter 5:8 “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may

devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.”

People of God, the Devil is a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, seeking you to devour. He is restrained, to be sure. And the power which is in you as a believer is stronger than that which is the devil, so when you resist him he must flee. That is the promise of,

James 4:7 “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

But with that encouragement is the warning of danger. The warning of a battle, a battle that will come to you every day of your life on earth. That battle, I believe, is what is described in,

Rev. 12:12 “Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.” 13 Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. 14 But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. 15 So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. 16 But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. 17 And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

The reality of that battle is the context for so many exhortations in the Bible. Perhaps the most familiar with reference to the Christian’s battle against Satan is found in,

Eph. 6:10 “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

Too many Christians ignore the reality of this battle. Too many Christians ignore the danger of the Devil. Too many Christians would rather conform to the patterns of the world rather than fight against the schemes of the devil. Too many professed Christians imitate the world, because they love the world, and that is the challenge you must face every day of your life as a Christian. You have an enemy, a personal enemy. Not flesh and blood, but an enemy among principalities and powers, an enemy among the rulers of the darkness of this age, the “spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

So think about it yourself. Repent of your own sin, when you failed to resist the Devil. Repent of your sin, where you are attracted to the world, where you love the things of the world. And “put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” Don’t take the Devil for granted, don’t underestimate his danger. Remember, he knows exactly where you are vulnerable, exactly when you are weak. And you must do battle against “spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

Sadly, many don’t fight that battle, and become those whom Jesus describes as “sons of the Devil.” There are weeds, and there always will be. Yet,

B. The success of the Devil is temporary.

There will be a day of reckoning, and his opportunity for causing harm and trouble will end. It remains a wheat field, and the tares shall be destroyed in the judgement of God. So, what do you do when you are in the midst of a struggle against the Devil? What is your encouragement in the midst of this world's trials and temptations? What is your hope even when you sin?

Consider the question of the parable,

v.28b. "The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?'"

The answer, of course, is "no." At least, "not yet."

v.29

But then,

v.30

This age will end. Jesus will put all his enemies under his feet. And they, we shall reign with him. The Devil's time is short. And that seems to be the obvious application of Jesus' description of the tribulation that would come with the destruction of Jerusalem within a generation after he lived on earth.

Mat. 24:21 "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. 22 And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short."

So,

1 Cor. 10:13 "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

So our battle against Satan is not a battle among equals. And the final result is not at all in doubt. The victory is ours in Christ. And, as this parable makes so clear, that victory will be fully established on the day of judgment.

III. A DAY OF JUDGMENT.

This really is the main point of the parable, the great warning, and the great encouragement to us.

v.39b-40

It will be a judgment by fire, noting the destruction of all that is wicked. That's what fire does. And,

A. The destruction of the wicked is sure and certain.

"So will it be at the end of the age." There will be reapers to gather the harvest, and the weeds will be burned. The image for the average farmer of Jesus' day was as clear as it could be.

v.30

Remember from the very outset of Jesus' ministry that this judgment had been predicted. John the Baptist spoke about Jesus with these words,

Mat. 3:11 "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

If there is one that is sure in God's revelation, it is that the day of judgment will come. To those who doubt, to those who think that God is not looking, that God will not vindicate his glory or protect his people, Peter writes,

2 Peter 3:8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with

the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”

More succinctly,

Heb. 9:27 “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”

The proclamation of the gospel must include this declaration, that,

B. Jesus will exact a righteous retribution upon the wicked.

v.41-42

That is not a pretty picture, but a very consistent one. Weeping and gnashing of teeth! Even more descriptively,

Rev. 14:14 Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” 16 So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. 17 Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. 18 And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of

the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.” 19 So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. 20 And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses’ bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.”

Yet in the midst of all of that, there is yet a promise to the godly, to the righteous.

C. The righteous will enjoy the glory of the eternal kingdom.

So the final judgment is a day of separation. The sheep shall be separated from the goats, one put on the right the other on the left. And the blessings to the righteous are unmistakable.

v.43

That’s us, believers, God’s people. We will shine like the sun in the eternal kingdom. Listen to a similar prophecy at the very end of the Old Testament.

Mal. 4:1 “For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” Says the LORD of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves. 3 You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do this,” Says the LORD of hosts.”

The sun of righteousness, s...u...n. The light shall shine. Your light, my light, in Christ. We shall shine as the sun in that eternal kingdom. And remember, Jesus will be the sun. Jesus will be the light. So the image is that God’s redeemed people,

made perfect, will shine with all the glorious righteousness of Jesus himself. They will be beloved children, in the kingdom of their father. Such is the glory that we look forward to, life everlasting!

Now, let me make some direct and specific applications of all of this. What does a focus upon the certainty of the eternal judgment do for us? First, patience.

James 5:7 “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. 8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!”

Be patient, in perseverance. Despite the presence of good and evil in this world. Despite the battle between good and evil. Despite the evil that might be done to you, or to the church of Jesus Christ. “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth.” Be patient, and wait for the harvest.

Then, confidence in the face of danger and trouble. So don’t be unsettled by the troubles of this world. Don’t be unsettled even by the horrible occasions when God’s people are persecuted, some unto death. Don’t be unsettled by the presence of evil doers in your own day to day life. Why is God allowing all of that? Why is he thus far withholding his final judgment?

Why? Why does God restrain his vengeance and allow his people to remain in the midst of evil doers, often in great danger of trouble and harm? Because he allows the weeds to grow, “lest

in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow until the harvest.”

And beloved of God, that harvest shall come.

Patience, confidence, then a warning against any temptation to love the world or to cling to the things of this world. Our joy, our glory, will be in our eternal righteousness, not in any of the fleeting pleasures of this world.

Let this be your your hope and your encouragement unto holiness here and now, that as the wicked are gathered the thrown into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, “the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father. He who has ears, let him hear.”