**Matthew 13:24-30,36-43** August 2, 2020

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 *Matthew 13:24Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. 27The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ 28‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ 29‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. 30Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’ ”*

 *36Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.” 37He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 38The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.*

 *40“As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

 I’d like to share with you a family tradition. When we go on longer journeys, we often take a story book with us. On really long vacations, we sometimes read an entire book out loud. On shorter trips, like this last December to Florida, we read several short stories. As we drive down the interstate, everyone puts down their devices for 10 or 20 or 30 minutes and listens. We have shared memories of “The King of the Golden River” and “The Princess Who Could not Be Silenced” and “Where the Red Fern Grows.” We enjoy talking about how common sense or how silly, how happy or sad the story was. With out-loud stories, even endless hours of interstate driving become cherished family memories.

 All of us love stories. That’s why we love Jesus’ parables. They are a welcome break from the more rigorous teaching Jesus often did. And like stories, parables bring people together. We all get lost in the narrative. Even Jesus’ opponents seem to have stopped and listened to his parables.

 Jesus’ parables are sometimes described as “earthly stories with heavenly meanings.” That’s a good summary. Jesus started many of his parables with ***“The kingdom of heaven is like…”*** It’s a story, with one eye on earth and one eye on heaven. Now while calling a parable “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning” is helpful, it can also be a little misleading. Not because it is a bad description, but because when *we* hear the word “heaven” we get the wrong idea. Heaven makes us think of clouds, harps, angels, halos and Saint Peter sitting at the gates like the hostess at Olive Garden: “Mr. Martin. No, I don’t see your name on the wait list. Sorry!” When we hear, ***“The kingdom of heaven is like…”*** or “an earthly story with a *heavenly* meaning” we key in on the word “heaven.” That creates a problem because Jesus’ parables often aren’t about heaven! They’re about earth. God’s kingdom is not just up in the clouds after Judgment Day. God’s kingdom is among us now.

 So, what does this parable of the weeds tell us about life in this world? For some of Jesus’ parables that was easy. People asked questions, and Jesus answered with a parable. When Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, he told it because someone had asked him, “Who’s my neighbor?”

 We should realize this about parables: every parable is the answer to a question. So for this parable, what was the question? We never hear the question. Maybe someone did ask it and it isn’t recorded in the Bible. Or maybe somebody couldn’t bring himself to ask a question in front of a big crowd, and so in his mercy Jesus answered the unasked question and somebody in the crowd went, “Hey, how did you know what I was thinking?” But *we* don’t know the question, so we have to kind of guess.

 Take the parable as a whole. Look at the wheat (believers) and the weeds (unbelievers). Look at how they have to stay together, even though they don’t really go together. Look at how the two will eventually be separated, and the underlying question must be something along the lines of, “Why do we children of God have to live in a world like this?” [Repeat.]

**I. Thus God Wants It**

 What a great question, and answer, for our day! As politics invades more and more of our privacy—whichever side of any issue you are on—we grow weary. We tire of the division and the fact that no one seems to be able to agree on anything anymore. This year there are more staycations than vacations. Every week the rules change for being out in public. The hymn, “The Church’s One Foundation” sings, “*As saints their watch are keeping; Their cry goes up, ‘How long?’*” Yes, “How much longer, Lord?” We find ourselves asking the implied question behind this parable. “Why do we children of God have to live in a world like this?”

 So Jesus tells us the parable of a man who sowed a field with good seed. Problem was, he had an enemy. Now if this parable had been in America, the enemy would have taken his mud-whomping 4x4 and done doughnuts in his wheat field. But this is not how the culture of Jesus day took care of grudges. One very knowledgeable commentator has noted that even to modern times dirty tricks like the one in this parable are common forms of revenge in Middle Eastern culture.[[1]](#endnote-1) This enemy wasn’t aggressively in his face; he was cunningly behind his back. None could trace him, and it would devastate the victim’s financial and even physical well-being.

 The more so because the specific weed mentioned isn’t just a generic weed, but a very specific weed called darnel. It looks nearly identical to wheat until fully grown. So, the farmer and workers in the parable looked at the field every day. They thought, “My, my, my! The wheat sure is looking great this year.” They had no idea! As summer turned to fall, and the grain was setting on, they saw disaster. The field that they thought would feed them for the next year was full of weeds, and only some wheat.

 You’ve been there: that exact moment when you go from thinking everything is great to realizing that the world is falling down around your ears. You know the panic. That was theirs. The workers ran to the master, ***“Do you want us to go and pull [the weeds] up?”*** If they had stopped to think for a moment, they would have known better. The owner stops them, ***“No, [don’t pull them up] because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them.”*** Yep. If they had spotted the weeds when they were just little green sprouts poking out of the ground, they could have done something. But now, with roots and leaves entangled, there would be no way to pull out the weeds without ruining the wheat.

 This is one half of the answer to the question, “Why do we children of God have to live in a world like this?” God has said that removing unbelievers would be detrimental to his people.

 How would that be bad for Christians? We can only guess. One partial explanation probably is that some who will one day be believers are still unbelievers today, and then how could they be saved? An additional point: a great many unbelievers do good and perform vital functions for society. Think of all the government office holders, police, shop owners, teachers, waiters and waitresses who serve us, but many of whom are not believers. We could make more guesses.

 But notice what Jesus has said in this response. He has said that God’s decision to let believers and unbelievers live together until ***“the end of the age”*** is wrapped up in what? Not his hatred or indifference or ignorance, but God’s goodness. He does not uproot the weeds because it would be harmful.

 This calls for faith. This calls for trust that God really does know what is best for us. Faith is the child at the doctor held by his mother while the doctor takes out that shiny two inch long needle and swabs it with antiseptic. To the child it looks like he is sharpening the thing up! And the child looks at mom with that worried look, “Mom, you’re not gonna let him… You can’t be serious…” And she does, and the doctor does, yet in the end the child’s trust of mother wins out. Even though he can’t believe that his mother just let that happen, the child still wants nothing more than a hug from his mother. He doesn’t understand it, but he still trusts her.

 That is the trust relationship required in this parable. This isn’t for spiritual babies. If you don’t trust God, if you don’t really believe that God moves heaven and earth for you—or better yet, once rent the heavens and came down to earth and then in his sin-forgiving death again opened heaven so that we sinful people can be saved for eternal life—if you don’t trust God for that, you won’t trust Jesus’ answer to your question, “Why do we Christians have to live in a world like this?” It is an issue of faith and trust that God rules every moment of life for your good – even the tough times.

 Jesus’ parable confirms the *status quo*. We live in an unbelieving world and that is how it is and will be as long as we live in this world. That is the way God wants it—for now.

**II. But It Won’t Always Be This Way**

 There is a second part. ***“As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”***

 “Why do we live in a world like this?” Jesus answers by saying it won’t always be like this. There will be a day of reckoning. There will be a judgment which will free us from this troublesome world.

 Here we must carefully observe what Jesus says about the two sides. He had said, ***“The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man… and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom.”*** Notice that the reason that they are the sons of the kingdom is not that what they have done, but that the “Son of Man” – that is, Jesus himself – planted them. He is the one who makes us worthy of the resurrection to eternal life, that we may shine like stars in God’s kingdom. Our life is about God’s work, his mercy, his forgiveness. Meanwhile, Jesus describes the condemned as ***“those who do evil.”*** Their fault for being eternally lost is not God’s fault, but their own. So we have this truth that is taught elsewhere, that everything relating a person’s salvation is to God’s credit, and everything relating to a person’s condemnation is credited to human sin.

 That condemnation is not a place where you laugh with the sinners, where the drinks are cheap and the morals loose. The worst of this world is the beginning of that punishment. It is a place of sorrow and pain ***“where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”***

 Which is a bit more than we wanted in an answer to our question about why we live in the world we live in. But now it makes sense why a loving God tolerates the wicked. He desires that they escape that condemnation, come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved.

**III. Remember It**

 Jesus closed his parable out saying, ***“He who has ears, let him hear!”***

 ***“Let him hear”*** means two things. First of all, the truths of this parable are not up for debate. When I look at the gas gauge on my car and it is dipping below the “E” line, I don’t get to say, “Well, this has been a tough month, I really don’t have the extra money” and so I blow by every gas station on Dixie Highway. What I think about my money and the gas gauge and the unfairness of it all won’t get me one inch farther down the road. And so when we listen to a parable about the fact that God wants us to go on living in this fallen world for a while, and that some day there is going to be a judgment and we won’t get a do-over, and that an awful lot of people are going to be thrown into hell, Jesus says, “Your job is to listen; not to talk.” You don’t get to objections. You don’t get to bargain and negotiate.

 But you know this: God knows everything going on in your life, and he rules all for the good of the ***“sons and daughters of the kingdom”*** So that one day ***“you may shine like the sun in the kingdom of [your] Father.”*** Amen.

1. Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p.407. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)