

WEEDS & WHEAT!, MATTHEW 13:24-43

Parables: Stories with a Secret #8

◆**Intro:** The first church our family served in ministry was in the fields of northwest Iowa where the farmers take great pride in their precision. Perfectly straight army rows of corn stand like soldiers ready for inspection. Manicured acres of beans spread to the horizon. It was easy to see that at least some of the residents in that region hailed from perfectionistic, Netherlandish background with potentially plenty of childhood issues. But their farms were heavenly. Other's not quite as pristine. Once in a while you'd pass a bean field with last year's residual corn stalks jutting up randomly in the otherwise consistent flow of soy, breaking the perfect symmetry. These was the distain of their purist neighbors! People make the same assumptions when they drive by fields of God's people. The world of men and women, for all it's perfect and stunning beauty, remains a marred and messy place, with tragedies jutting out randomly from otherwise smooth fields of green life. And we often make one of a few conclusions: either 1) there really is no farmer out there at all, (but then how do we explain the obvious landscape design?) or 2) he's not a very good farmer because he either can't stop the weeds of life, or he won't and since we don't like weeds, and think he should, we doubt his goodness, and may decide we needn't bother much with him.

◆The weeds of life we are talking about today are the problems of evil in the world. We often ask, if there is a God, why is there evil? And if he's a good God, why doesn't he just weed all the evil out of the world so life can be just good? Sometimes you might find yourself wishing that God would clean up his act a little and stop allowing for so much mess: billions undernourished; millions are trafficked in slavery; nearly 2 million children

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exploited annually in commercial sex trade; more than that die from diseases we in North America have cures for! Evil seems to pervade the fields of life!

◆**1. The presence of evil remains mysterious, but mystery does not undo God.** We don't have all the answers to it in the Bible. But plenty of Jesus parables point to the reality that God allows evil, and evil people to continue to exist in his world.

◆In the parable of the wedding feast he invites everyone he can find, good and bad, without distinction. In the parable of the dragnet he catches sea creatures of every kind, useful and un-useful in the same net. The sorting comes later. "But Master, shouldn't we just fish for tuna, or bass? Them's good eat'n!"

◆"No, throw out a net in pull in everything you get, sting rays and sand dollars too."

◆God seems to let the sticky problem of evil linger in the Kingdom of God and good. That's the surprise of this parable about the weeds. The servants/angles are shocked. "Master, didn't you plant special Pioneer hybrids seed, guaranteed to be 99% pure? Where did the weeds come from?" And that's us. We're preoccupied with explaining evil. If God is good, where did Satan come from? If God is all-powerful, why doesn't he shoot Satan and get it over with? There are some hints in the Bible on this, but it remains a mystery without direct explanation. We know there is an "enemy" that does this (v28). He musta snuck in at night and hightailed it outta there before dawn. How did he get past a God stronger than him? Why didn't God stop him? Now sometimes explanations make the pain

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permissible; the doctor says this will hurt but in the long run we'll get better. Ok. But we might wonder if there is any explanation that makes us Ok with our daughter being killed on a hiking trail in Delphi. Whatever the case, God has not given us explanations for all evil, so our faith in him remains just that, faith. Faith that he is, and faith that he is good.

◆ So the presence of evil in our world remains mysterious; there is much we do not know. On the other hand we do better to affirm what we do know. When we are fallen in a pit, we can defiantly complain that there is no good reason for it, or we can look for a rope. What do we know? One thing is undebatably clear in Scripture: God has lowered us a rope, better yet, a son who came to grab hold of us. Jesus' message and his death and resurrection continue to point to a reality, a reality of hope. There is death, but God is life and he can reverse death. Hope in God. Yes, there are weeds, but the harvest is coming, and the weeds shall be no more. The wheat (*sons of the Kingdom*, v38) will kept.

◆ This is reinforced in the next two parables of the mustard seed (another seed), and the yeast. Mustard starts out small, but mustard is one of those things you don't want in your garden because it takes over. When we moved into our present house there was a little mint growing in raised garden. I didn't garden the first year. Guess what, almost nothing but mint in the whole thing! Everywhere. It takes over the whole thing without asking. When Sandi and I were in Jerusalem, our travel guide mentioned that the city has a ban against mustard. It cannot be planted within city limits! It takes over. Well, that's what Jesus says about the Kingdom. Hope in your God, people. There

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might be evil now. The Kingdom might look small now. But it won't be! You may not be able to see yeast at first, but you know it's there when the bread rises! Jesus said

◆ *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” John 16:33, NASB.*

◆ In the parable he promised...

◆ *“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.” Matthew 13:41, NIV.*

◆ Listen to the voices of believers down through the centuries saying: Don't fret. It ain't over yet.

◆ It's what Psalm 73 sings about.

◆ *“This is what the wicked are like--always carefree, they increase in wealth. Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. ...When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.” Psalms 73:12-17, NIV.*

◆ It's what Toby Mac sings about.

I know your heart been broke again

I know your prayers ain't been answered yet
I know you're feeling like you got nothing left
Well, lift your head, it ain't over yet, ain't over yet so

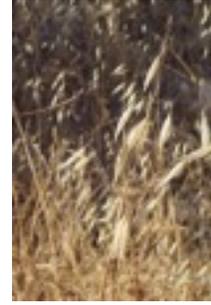
Move, keep walkin' soldier keep movin' on
Move, keep walkin' until the mornin' comes
Move, keep walkin' soldier keep movin' on
And lift your head, it ain't over yet, ain't over yet

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◆2. Now if we may, lets turn to something positive about the presence of evil in our world. **The continuing presence of evil actually points to the gracious nature of God.** The farmer could have let the servants yank the weeds. But there would be a problem with that. The term here is “darnel” which is a species of rye-grass that produces a grain that is a soporific poison. That is, it’s a drug that makes you sleepy. You can’t tell the difference between wheat and darnel until the grain appears. (**show pix:**

israel trip 380, 386) By that time the darnel would be well rooted in with the wheat and pulling up one could damage the other. Have you ever weeded your garden? The other day I pulled out some cilantro I planted in my haste to grab at



weeds! So the farmer allows the weeds to compete with the wheat for now, for the sake of his wheat.

◆*“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9, NIV.*

◆*““What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.” Matthew 18:12-14, NIV.*

◆This points to the highly personal nature of God’s patience and concern. As Jesus says in the book of John chapter 10, God knows who his sheep

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are. He has sheep in other pens, and places and he intends to gather each one. Everything the Father does he does for the sake of his elect, for their life, their betterment, and their salvation. I know it doesn't feel like it to you. It doesn't always feel like it to me either. Years ago, standing in line at the PK '94 Convention in Bolder CO., I met Mark. He was in front of me in line, no shirt in the hot mountain sun, twice my size, and covered with tattoos: a pile of skulls airborne by a great eagle with a lions body; a naked girl underneath; an indian woman, a wolf, a man's body with a snarling cougar head; a Konan-the-Barbarian-type woman swinging a spiked ball; snakes twisting through it all, with barbwire and feathers... I tapped him on the shoulder and asked, "Hey, what's this stuff all about?" He turned, leaned over me, looked down at my puny physique, and muttered "Nothin'". Later on he approached me in stadium and asked me to forgive him for not sharing his story. He explained that "these things are a life of bondage from which Jesus set me free!" He had become a Christian three years earlier. Two years before that he'd been right there in the same stadium for a five band concert full of drug use and other unmentionable practices. Today he was there to praise Jesus, whom he had promised he would use his former addiction to tattoos as a witnessing tool instead. He asked me to forgive him. Keep in mind he was a head taller and twice as wide as me. There was no way I was gonna deny him forgiveness! I said, "Bless you, my son!" and made the sign of the cross! There were some ugly weeds that were a part of Mark's life (maybe literally!). But God did not destroy Mark. Rather, he gave him the time and opportunity to repent.

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◆ *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”*

Romans 8:28-32, NIV.

◆ If you are a believer, you need to know that everything God allows into your life aims at your eventual good. The one who promised is faithful. He will do it.

◆ One final thought on this point. Being that God is so patient, and so “for” us in every way, it would seem that you and I can emulate such grace with the weeds we run into as well, would it not? It’s not uncommon for church people, once saved from miserable life forms they once practiced, to swing to the opposite side out of fear, or remorse and become professional weeders! Let one nasty little evil pop it’s head over the wall and BLAM, the perp gets both barrels!

◆ Maybe you’ve heard of of the castaway who was finally rescued from solitary living on an island. On departure, his rescuers noticed three thatched building, strange for an island with only one person. The castaway explained, “Oh that one is my house. That one is my church. And that last one is the church I used to go to.”

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◆ We run from the imperfect and attack the flawed. And separate ourselves from everyone who doesn't measure up exactly with us. William Willimon writes, "such attempts to chop our dead wood, pare down to the really committed and good usually end up creating a church full of people who look more like those who crucified Jesus than those who followed him." So, let's be like Christ with the weeds we experience. I hear he can even genetically modify an organism!

◆ **3. God has not called me to a life of ease, but to a life of contest.**

This, I think is somewhat contrary to our impulses. We seek the easy road. We try to shelter our children from influences of the world. But God does not do this with us. He has not sought to hide us from evil's presence. He not told us to escape to uninhabited territory.

◆ *"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one... As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world." John 17:15-18, NIV.*

◆ He has not promised us an endless string of victory after victory if we will follow him. He has promised us eternal victory, but a road to war on the way. The life of following the one true God is a life of contesting. The weeds are mixed right in there with the wheat all the way up to the Great Harvest. What does this mean? Pull on your boots and go to war. You Christian have to fight for the right every day. You have to speak for the wheat! You have to grow up and contend with the weeds for space to drop seeds. You are on commission!

◆ A final element in this parable of weeds and wheat.

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◆**4. If God was only a weeder, I would not stand a chance at the garden, much less the barn.** Some feel that it's mysterious that God would throw out any weeds at all. They claim that a loving God would let weeds grow too, and harvest them into the barn too. How can a good God burn up anything, or anyone? Well, that's a bit of philosophical foolishness on the one hand because a truly good God cannot abide with evil. He must by definition destroy it or he wouldn't be good. You see, goodness does not mean accepting badness. The two are eternally incompatible. Which brings us to the real mystery: why, given a good and holy God, anything in a fallen world remains at all. By rights he ought to destroy the whole mess, including you and me, for nothing in the created realm is unstained by the sin of humanity. Not one of us can claim to be without sin. (1John1:8) The only result of a truly dedicated campaign to get rid of ALL weediness would be to abolish all of us. Evil is kind of like weeds that won't die from broadleaf killer. You gotta kill everything including the lawn to obliterate them. But because God wanted Adam and Eve, and many many of their offspring to make it into the barn of heaven, he let his son drink the poison in place of his people. Praise God he is not merely a weeder, but a farmer!

◆**Conclusion:**

◆“He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.” 1 John 3:8, NIV.

◆Listen friends, God knows all of our troubles. They do not surprise him. He does not promise endless joys in following him, constant victories and delights. Christianity is not an escape from reality. But the harvest is

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assured. There will be a sorting! There will be an end to all sin, and sin doing.

◆“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”” Revelation 21:4, 5, NIV.

◆All demons, all temptation, all presence of the wrong possibilities -gone! We won't need filters for our water, or filters for our search engines. We won't hear garbage on our radios, or lies from the podium. Teen Vogue will no longer publish articles on how to commit sodomy, as they did recently. Older people will never again ask “What is this world coming to?” or marvel at how loose things have become in comparison to how they were raised. No. But those made righteous by the Son of God will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father! (v43) so let's live like that!