

ESF, Lord's Day service message
3/22/2015

The Parable of the Weeds

Matthew 13:24-30

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ "The 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 uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let 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.'"

Through this parable, Jesus is teaching us the wisdom of living a happy life in this troubled world.

It is the wisdom to live with peace of mind although everything in this world seems to be imperfect. It is the wisdom to live with hope when this world seems to be hopeless because of the existence of evil.

We must see God's goodness in this evil world

To live with peace of mind, and to live with hope always, we need to be patient with the imperfect world around us.

There are some people who are pessimistic of everything in this world. They think that this world is full of evil and the evil is overpowering the good. So this world has no hope. Some of them refuse to believe in the existence of God because of the problem of evil in this world.

Some of them may be perfectionists. When they pursue perfect purity in this world, they always see something imperfect. And they get upset and discouraged. When they come to church, they may easily spot something wrong, some people who look like hypocrites. And they don't want to come to church any more or they don't want to get involved in any church activity. They are complaining: *the church is full of problems and hypocrites. It is worse than the secular world.*

They are like farmers complaining about weeds in their field. They expect a perfect field with 100 % wheat and no weeds at all and when they find weeds, they are totally discouraged and give up on farming all together.

That is what Satan provokes us to do. Satan sows the seed of evil in this world, and provokes us to see the world with perfectionism. By doing so, Satan makes us pessimistic and hopeless.

But in this parable, Jesus teaches us to see things differently. Jesus teaches that the existing of evil does not mean that this world is hopeless. Jesus teaches that as long as we live in this fallen world, we cannot completely avoid evil. As long as we live in this world, we will face something imperfect. There does not exist a field which has no weeds at all but only 100 % wheat. Every field has not only wheat but also weeds which are similar to the wheat but which are counterfeits. Even the church will not be immune to this mixture. There are sinners in the church. We all may fall into the temptation of hypocrisy from time to time.

But Jesus still loves the church. And there are many people who honestly acknowledge their sins and repent from their sins. More than that there is cleansing power in the church-the blood of Christ, and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit which can turn weed-like hearts into wheat-like hearts.

So, although we have to pursue holy lives, we should not get discouraged when we fall into sin from time to time. Although we should hate sin, we should not give up hope in God's goodness when we find sinners in the church. When Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians, he had to deal with so many sins and problems in the Corinthian church. But he did not judge them hopelessly. He saw the positive side based on God's faithfulness, and God's transforming power. He said to them in 1 Cor. 1:8-9:

He (God) will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

You cannot always be a perfect person without any mistakes or sins. You should not make excuses of your sins but you also should not give up on hope for your growth and change. Because God never gives up on you. God's graceful work in Christ for you will continue.

We must not hurt the good while we deal with the evil

Here the servants distinguished the wheat from the weeds. That was an ability of discernment between good and evil. With the discernment, they would like to pull the weeds out from the field of wheat. However, the owner of the field did not allow them to do so. He told the reason: *"because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them."*

In ancient farm fields, both weeds and wheat might look alike until they mature and bear fruit. The weeds looked so much like wheat that it was hard to tell one from the other. It made the task of uprooting the weeds

dangerous because wheat could be mistaken for weeds. So if the farmers were not patient enough to wait until they could be sure to distinguish weeds from wheat, they could root out the wheat while they were trying to root out the weeds. Wise farmers had to learn to be patient.

When we love God, we want to be holy and we want to make our church holy. We need discernment to distinguish the good from the evil. We have to fight the good fight against evil and against sin. We have to deal with sin problems in the church.

But we should not be in a hurry in dealing with sinners. We should be very patient and gentle in dealing with the evil among the good. Why?

Because we may hurt the good while we try to take out the evil.

Satan has a strategy of try to duplicate counterfeits to confound God's purpose as well as God's people. Satan tries to use our impatience against each other. It is Satan's desire that we will get so impatient that we will start to uproot whatever we think might be a weed as opposed to wheat. Satan provokes us to be impatient so that we would quickly turn on each other and suspect each other of being a weed that needs to be uprooted. The tendency is that we have the capacity to become obsessed with the speck in the eye of a brother while neglecting the log in our own eyes (Matthew 7: 3-5).

There may be people who have a seed of wheat in their hearts, but simply are too weak to carry out the growth of the seed. There may be some believers, who really believe in God and in Jesus, but who are immature and making mistakes and falling into sin more than others. So if we judge such people just as we see them now, we may discourage them and so they may give up on having fellowship with God's people.

We also do not know the hidden motive and complex backgrounds of other people. So if we hurry in judging others, we may hurt them rather than help them.

Back in the days when journeys to Europe still required a rather long ship voyage, one particular bishop headed over to the Continent for a world gathering of Christian leaders. After coming on board, he discovered that he was to share a cabin with another fellow. Judging from his appearance, the good bishop decided that he might not be the most trustworthy guy around.

So the bishop went up to the purser's desk and asked if he could leave his gold watch and other valuables in the ship's safe. The purser told him that he would be happy to lock his valuables up for safe keeping. "I perfectly understand, bishop," he said. The other man has been up here and left his valuables for the same reason."

There are many reasons why some people are doing things and behaving certain ways that we think are bad or evil. While we are judging evil of others by our own understanding, it may not be evil in the eyes of God who sees the hidden motive and hidden backgrounds of man's every behavior. We are not God. We're not quite as good at discernment as Jesus is. So we must be patient with the evil of others.

We must honor God's authority of final judgement on evil

God allows us to discern good from evil, but God does not give us the authority to bring final judgement on the evil. That authority belongs only to God. So if we try to bring final judgement on evil, we will violate the law of God's authority. God alone has wisdom and authority to determine when the weeds will be uprooted and separated from the wheat of His field.

There are times when we get in God's way when He is tending the business of His kingdom here on earth.

A man was struggling with a large box at the back end of his truck. A passing neighbor saw his plight and came over to help him. He put his shoulder to the box. After a few tiring moments the neighbor exclaimed, "What's in that box anyway? I don't think we will ever get it on the truck." "Get it on!" the exasperated man shouted, "I'm trying to get it off!"

That is the very reason that we sometimes fail to see that we are trying to put the box on the truck when God wants the box off the truck.

Well-meaning Christians can be God's worst enemies. When we judge and condemn others, when we set up our own standards of what it means to be saved, when we claim absolute knowledge of God's will and of his Scriptures, we take over God's role and attempt to run his business" (Richard Carl Hoefler. *The Divine Trap*. Lima: C. S. S. Publishing Company, 1980, p. 47).

God is patient and waiting. There are some who think that God does not act fast enough in removing the weeds from the field. The field belongs to God. Unlike us, God is patient. God tolerates the weeds, because in the end, some who appeared to be evil will become good, and some who appeared to be good will be revealed as evil. We can't always tell who is who.

God has a plan and His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8,9). God wants to usurp the power of evil and the hold that it has on those who are lost. 2 Peter 3:9 says: *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.*

God is therefore not indifferent! Quite the contrary! God is waiting and desiring the salvation of all! So, whenever we struggle with the problem

of evil in our lives, we have to learn to put our faith in God and be patient as we wait for God to accomplish His plan.

Have you experienced injustice and wondered why God does not deal with the injustice? Have you ever tempted to deal with the evil and bring justice with your own hand?

An Atheist farmer often ridiculed people who believed in God. He wrote the following letter to the editor of a local newspaper: "I plowed on Sunday, planted on Sunday, cultivated on Sunday, and hauled in my crops on Sunday; but I never went to church on Sunday. Yet I harvested more bushels per acre than anyone else, even those who are God-fearing and never miss a service." The editor printed the man's letter and then added this remark: "God doesn't always settle His accounts in October." That editor was right! He doesn't always "settle His accounts in October," but He does settle His accounts!

Paul said to the Thessalonians who were suffering unjustly from the evil in the world: *"God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels"* (2 Thessalonians 1:6-7).

Trust that God knows every injustice. Trust that God will surely judge all evil and bring justice. Put the matter of vengeance into God's hand.