

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Today we are going to discuss the parable of the weeds from Matthew 13 and its explanation. We are going to talk about what this parable is not, and what it is.

We pray, Lord sanctify us in the truth, your word is truth. Amen.

Have you ever participated in the manual removal of weeds from broad acre cropping? My Dad was a fan of this method, in some circumstances. Sometimes the 'weed' is so closely related to the 'crop' manual removal is the only option, selective herbicide can't get the job done. Wild Radish in canola is one situation. Dad's favoured removal method was to wait until the radish flowered (they were pale yellow from what I recall and stood out from the surrounding crop.) Then all the family, usually on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, whoever was available, would walk up and down in the paddock and pull out any plant they saw, placing them in bags to be destroyed. Dad even pulled these weeds out manually from wheat and barley so that there was no seed residue for the following canola crop.

This is what Jesus describes in the parable, weeds that look like crop or are hard to remove. Note like last week this is a descriptive parable. The thing that should stand out in the parable is the farmers method for removal of the weed. It isn't how farmers of Jesus day removed weeds and it isn't how farmers today remove weeds. Modern farmers try to remove the weeds before seeding and as soon as they emerge so that the crop has the greatest opportunity. They use chemicals. Farmers of Jesus day would have obviously removed the weed when it was visible, as it was a less mechanised society, they just walked into the field and pulled out the weed. The farmer in the parable is happy to let the weeds come up to head and only be removed at harvest time, he is willing to patiently wait until the whole crop is mature before he removes the weeds, he wants all people to be saved!

This is not Jesus' teaching on agriculture and pest eradication. You should not follow the example of the man who didn't allow the weeds, or any pest for that matter to be dealt with. If you are growing crops or raising animals you should, to the best of your ability, attempt to grow healthy, vibrant and clean food without disease or weeds.

This is not Jesus' opinion and teaching on justice and order in our wider society. We should not use this parable as an excuse for evil in our society and the removal of earthly punishments for obvious crimes. Nor should we use this parable to justify and excuse ourselves from the ramifications of our law breaking or the hurt we cause others. Jesus is not saying here, just do what you like I'll sort it out in the final judgement, he is describing to us what will happen. On this same topic this parable is not reason for us to get on board with James and John who, when observed that people didn't want to listen to Jesus, asked if they could 'call down fire from heaven and destroy them!'

This is not Jesus' teaching on excommunication or discipline in the church. He is not excusing blatant and unrepentant sin and evil in the church. We should continue to call each other to repentance so that we find our true hope in Jesus Christ for us. To find this hope we have to admit that we are all sinners.

This is not Jesus' solution to false teachers in the church. He has other advice and commands for us on this matter; that is, run, have them removed, do not listen to them.

This parable is Jesus' description of what the earth looks like now, and what will happen when he returns. Note the explanation of the parable.

"The one who sows the good seed is the **Son of Man.**³⁸ The field is **the world**, and the good seed is **the sons of the kingdom**. The weeds are the sons of **the evil one**,³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is **the devil**. The harvest is the **end of the age**, and the **reapers are angels**.⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers,⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. Matthew 13:37–43 (ESV)

Jesus describes here that he sowed good seed, that is believers, into this world and continues to do that. The evil one, Satan has sown bad seed. He is responsible for sin and evil in this world, not God. This world is full of those sinners, evil runs rampant on this earth. This is, remember, descriptive.

For now, while we wait for Jesus' return, these plants grow along side each other. Believers – sons of God, and non-believers - sons of the devil. As Paul later tells us, those led by the spirit and those led by the flesh. This parable describes the angst that we experience as we wait for Christ to return, it tells us how we should look at and deal with evil and sin; **to a degree**. That is, it is not possible to completely remove sin and evil from this earth in this lifetime because in doing so we would remove the believers also. The fruitful crop would be destroyed. When Jesus returns, he will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Therefore, evil is not something for us to eradicate on this earth, God will deal with it when Jesus returns. There will be a judgment as we confess in the creed, he is coming to judge the living and the dead.

This should be a great comfort to us, and is the hope that Paul talks of in Romans 8. That evil will be done away with, sin will be no more, God's people will live at peace. The new earth will not experience the same effects of sin that we experience now. The groaning of creation under the weight of sin and evil will be complete, the sons of God will be set free.

It should also form part of our motivation to spread the saving Word of God; those who are cast into the fiery furnace will not be happy with it, they will gnash their teeth. Because they didn't trust when they had the opportunity, and instead chose evil over good and to them this is not fair. Although they inevitably get what they wanted, eternity away from God!

We should be comforted because Jesus assures us that: 'all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.' Romans 8:14 (ESV) and that: 'the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.' Romans 8:18 (ESV). I can't highlight this enough, Jesus is not asking you to consider if you are wheat or weeds, he is describing sin and evil in the world he created good. In the same vein Paul is telling you that you do belong to God, you are Sons of God, you are wheat, not weeds. The Spirit has made you this way, when in baptism he united you to Christ's death and resurrection. You are not in the flesh (you are not sons of the devil), you are in the Spirit and are continually renewed by the Spirit as you hear the word and receive the gifts of God in his sacrament.

While comforting us and reminding us that it is God who works good in this world and the devil who works evil, this parable should also encourage us into action. Many around us are either wittingly or unwittingly sons of the devil and destined for eternal punishment. God has given us a role to play, it is ultimately his work, but he invites us to join him in spreading good seed, his good seed, (to mix the parable from last week together with this one).

This parable tells us how to wait, that is a message of the Gospel, that God is waiting for the right time until he brings this world to an end. We can't eradicate suffering, sin or evil, God will do that in his allotted time. We can't pick and choose who are sons of God and who are sons of the devil; God makes this decision based on his commands and promises to us. We can, however, continue to hope in our Lord, put our trust in our Saviour, so that we are found to be sons of God, good seeds, and do his work so that more good seeds are sown and grown into his kingdom.

We should see Paul's words to the Romans as a commentary on this parable when he writes,

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Romans 8:18–25 (ESV)

Here Paul describes both the reaping and the waiting. We are to wait in hope, trusting God's promises to us, patiently waiting, and enduring with Christ just as he endured all our sin and shame on the cross.

Amen

The peace of God that surpasses all our understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen