

Title: What ON earth is going on?
Text: Matthew 13.24-30; 36-43
Theme: The vindication of the believers.
Series: Matthew #74
Prop Stmt: God's plan for the world includes the temporary flourishing of evil.

The headlines this week have not been particularly encouraging have they? Ebola, ISIS, Immigration and the Stock Market. If you were worried that you might run out of things to worry about, this was your week. Have you ever thought, where can I go to get away from all of this? I just want to hide so bad stuff does not find me and my family. Have you ever thought that? I think most of us have, because this stuff is serious. We wonder, how would I respond, or what would happen to me if what is happening to other people actually happened to me. I mean, this stuff can't happen here, can it? It is tempting to pretend that we can be left alone if we want to. Countries have tried that, haven't they? Leave us alone. We won't bother you, please don't bother us. We don't want to take sides. We just want to mind our own business. We just want to go on with lives. That certainly is tempting; it is also fundamentally naïve and practically impossible. You are in this world and this world is in conflict.

When you think of this parable, I want you to think of orbiting the earth from the space shuttle, because this parable is a view of the earth from way up high. Jesus is giving us a big picture. He is telling us that the entire world is like a field in which there is conflict. And I hate to break it to you, but there are no sidelines in this conflict. There is no neutral space. You can try to run from the conflict, but you cannot hide from it. It will find you. So, the issue for you is, what are you going to do about it? Let me tell you what not to do. Do not panic. Do not fret. Do not fear. The conflict is real, but you are not alone. The conflict is real, but it will not last forever, you will. The conflict is real, but it cannot steal your joy because your joy is safe in Christ. The conflict is real, but it is on a leash and God holds the leash.

Read Text:

Once again, Matthew records Jesus giving the parable to the crowd (24-30), but the interpretation of the parable is not given until after Jesus is back in a home in a private meeting with his disciples (36-43). Therefore, we are going to look at both the parable and the interpretation of it. Next Sunday, David Dunham will double back and preach on verses 31-35. So, before we dial in, let's make a few general observations.

- The parable is given to all, but the interpretation is only for his disciples.

This reminds us again that when Jesus gave these parables he was giving additional revelation and therefore a blessing to those who believed in him, while at the same time he was hiding things and therefore was pronouncing judgment on those who did not believe in him.

- It sounds a bit similar to the first parable.

Both of the parables deal with planting and harvesting and both talk about the involvement of the Evil One, that is, the devil. In the first parable, the emphasis was on the different types of soil. Here, there is an emphasis on the two different types of seed. The two types of seed reflect the intentions of the man who owned the field and the intentions of his enemy. Again, Jesus was giving this parable from a boat to a large crowd of people who were surrounded to some degree by fields behind them.

- Our interpretation of this parable is informed (and governed) by Jesus's interpretation.

Let's say that there is someone who is a member of our church who is living in rebellion to God's Word. Do we do anything about it? Do we talk to the person? Do we seek to correct him/her? Do we ignore it? Those who think that we should address this can appeal to Matthew 18, where Jesus gives us instructions about how to do that. Those who think we shouldn't, might appeal to this parable and say, "Look, even Jesus said that good plants and bad plants are going to grow together and that you shouldn't try to weed out the bad plants because you will mess up some of the good plants." Now, to people who do not like confrontation, that sounds plausible, right? But, what is the problem with that view? That is not what Jesus is talking about here, is it? Jesus does not say that the field is the church; he says that the field is the world. When Jesus interprets a parable one way, we have to interpret it the same way.

- This parable is characterized by what, and not by why.

Jesus is using a broad brush. He is telling us what is going to happen, not why he is doing it this way. Jesus always tells us what we need to know, but he never tells us everything there is to know. He tells us all that we need in order to obey him. He does not have to tell us everything as if he has to justify his actions and gain our approval. The kingdom of heaven is not a democracy. The kingdom of heaven is a monarchical dictatorship. The kingdom of heaven is ruled by a king who is unlike any king you have ever met or known about. This king is forever. This king is all powerful. This king is perfect. This king used his position of authority and strength of power to step down from the throne that he might lay down on a cross. So, if he does not tell us everything, it is not because he has something sinister hidden up his sleeve that he is afraid you will discover.

The kingdom of heaven is same kingdom as the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the Son of Man. He says that you can compare the kingdom of heaven to a man who sowed **good** seed in his field. Here is what happens. The owner of the field provides good seed for his men to plant in the field. The men planted the seed. They used the good seed. But, while they were sleeping, his enemy, (the enemy of the owner) sowed weeds among the good seed. The men did not see it. The men were sleeping. When the crop began to appear, everything looked good. However, it did not stay that way. After a while it became clear that there were some weeds planted with the crop. In fact, this was probably a plant that is called, darnel. It is a weedy rye grass that actually has poisonous black seeds. When it first comes up, it looks like wheat, but after

some time it becomes obvious that it is not. The men are confused. It appears to them that the Master gave them some bad seed, but that makes no sense to them. So, they ask respectfully about how this could happen. The Master tells them that an enemy has done this. The servants want to know what they can do about it. The Master tells them to wait until it is time for the harvest, then they will sort it out. When Jesus interprets this for his disciples he makes some startling statements.

I. There are two kingdoms in conflict to the death. (36-38a)

A. The world is the kingdom of the Son of Man.

The one who sows is the Son of Man (37). The man who sows is doing so, in His field (24). The field is the world. (38). The world, therefore, is the kingdom of the Son of Man. The theme of Matthew's gospel is: Behold your King! This king is not like any king that anyone has ever encountered before. This means that his kingdom is unlike any kingdom that you have ever seen before either. Jesus intentionally uses the title, Son of Man. Where did this come from? Look at Daniel 7.9-14

B. This is the Son of Man that Daniel talked about.

Daniel did not have a fully developed doctrine of the Trinity, but even here in chapter 7, it is clear that the Ancient of Days is distinct, in some capacity, from the Son of Man. But, it is the Son of Man who is given the kingdom and the kingdom is an everlasting kingdom that rules all peoples, nations and languages. Now, to many of the Jews, their concept was that one day the Messiah would return and would make Israel the people who would rule the world. But that is not what Jesus says, is it? The field is the world. The good seed (which are the sons of the kingdom) are planted all over the world. Therefore...

C. People from all over the world are going to be in the kingdom of the Son of Man.

We hear that and are not shocked at all by it. But, if the disciples were really paying attention, Jesus just rocked their boat. The kingdom is not limited to Israel. The kingdom is the entire world. It should not come as a surprise then when Jesus, at the end of this gospel tells his disciples to go into all the world and make disciples. That issue causes enormous problems for Jesus, for the early church, for Paul and for true followers of Christ, ever since. You see, the church is supposed to be a local reflection of the field. But, while this issue is present in this parable, it is not the main idea. Here is part of the main point.

II. Satan is actively seeking to destroy God's children (kingdom).

I used to work at a summer camp when I was in high school. The camp had a little problem with skunks. One night, a co-worker and I saw a skunk in a field about 30 yards away. We wanted to keep the skunk away from the where the campers were, but we were

not exactly certain how you scare a skunk, especially if you do not have a gun. I happened to spot a piece of a concrete block and decided to heave it at the skunk, which I did. It was a once-in-a-lifetime shot. The block landed right on the skunk. The skunk let out one last enormous spray and died. Fortunately for us, it sprayed in the direction of the road behind it. Unfortunately, my boss had purchased a brand new car earlier that day, and the skunk sprayed right at the time that the car went by with its windows down.

Do you remember the Gulf War? It did not take long to realize that Saddam Hussein and his Revolutionary Guard could not stand before the armed forces of the coalition. But, as Saddam retreated from Kuwait, he ordered his men to set fire to every oil well they could. Hitler had a similar reaction. As the Allied forces drove up from North Africa, and through Italy, as the troops from D-Day began to press in from the west, and as Russian forces fought back from the east, it was obvious that Hitler's days were numbered. His time was short. Did he sue for peace? No. He was like a maniac. He ignored any sane advice from his generals and instead of saving thousands of lives of German soldiers and citizens, he ordered them to fight on. The Battle of the Bulge was some of the most intense fighting that ever took place in the European theater of W.W.II. You only had to do the math to know that Hitler was finished. Here in Detroit, we were called the cradle of democracy. We, as a nation were producing 50-60 tons of steel a year. Germany was producing about 13-14 and was getting flattened by Allied bombing. But, the closer the end came, the greater the rage grew.

Beloved, that is exactly what is happening in this world. Satan is like the skunk who has had the cross impale his heart and the stone from the empty tomb crush his skull and he is letting out his stink before he is banished. Revelation 12 is describing the same thing. Satan is thrown out of heaven. He can no longer accuse the children of God. His being cast out of heaven is obviously tied in some way to the certainty of his defeat which was secured by the death and resurrection of Christ. Satan's hopes of winning are obviously smashed. He cannot win. But, he does not quit. Heaven rejoices but the earth is warned. Satan has come with great wrath because he knows that his time is short.

He is out of control. He is on a mission to do as much harm as he can before his formal demise. Jesus depicts this activity as the planting of evil seed. Anywhere where God's children are found, Satan is at work. Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 3 that "*all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*" If you are a follower of Christ, you are wanted. You are hated. You are a target. But...

III. In spite of this, believers will thrive and overcome. (38-39)

What happens in the field? The wheat and the weeds both grow. Yes, the weeds are nasty and poisonous, but they do not destroy the wheat. The wheat is in the world and the weeds are in the world. We are in this world together. Believers are not called to retreat from the world or run away from conflict. You cannot avoid the conflict. There is a war that is going on in this world. There is no neutrality and the consequences are eternal. We are in the world, but not of the world.

It appears that we are coming to end of a season that has been unusual for believers. I mentioned in the blog this week that 5 pastors in Houston were sent subpoena's from the city attorney's office, ordering them to turn over any sermon and other material that they may preached or communicated pertaining to homosexuality, gender distinction or the city's recent ordinance on non-discrimination (which by the way makes it permissible for a man to use a ladies restroom). Left to stand, this will affect building codes and occupancy permits. As a restaurant, a business or a church will not be able to label your own restroom facilities on the basis of gender. You hear that, and you say, wait a minute, this is America. You can't do that. This is America, and they did. And the mayor is not backing down. This is coming. Do not think that the constitution is going to protect us. The constitution was made by men and can be unmade by men. The constitution only protects us to the degree that there are people who are willing to interpret it correctly and enforce it. Open your eyes! Laws are being passed that are only revealing what we were supposed to know all along and that is this: This country is part of a world that is not a friend to the gospel. But that is not the entire story. So, while evil will grow, so too will the glory of the Lord fill the earth. The parable is clear. Weeds do not wipe out the wheat. They both grow up until the harvest. The Son of Man will send in his angels and they will harvest the weeds and the wheat. So, yes, the weeds will grow, but the weeds don't win. The wheat grows too and it grows all over the world. How is that going to happen? How do believers thrive in the midst of this? Jesus does not answer this question in this parable. Here he simply says that it will. I believe that the answer to that question is found in Revelation 12.11

A. Believers conquer through the blood of the Lamb (the gospel).

Christ, the Lamb of God came to this world to take away our sins. That is, he has freed us from our sins. He has given us the right to reign as priest and kings and because we have been declared righteous in the eyes of God, there is no charge or accusation that Satan can level against us that can stick. There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Christ Jesus has secured forever every heavenly blessing for you by his perfect life, all-atoning death, and triumphant resurrection. You have it all in Christ. You only await your experience of it.

Let me explain it this way. Let's say that there are two Hebrew dads who were living in Egypt on the night of the Passover. Both of them had applied the blood of the lamb to their doorposts. But before they went into their homes for the evening, the one man (Mordecai) was talking with another man (Habakkuk). Mordecai says, "You know, I'm not sure about this blood thing. I'm still nervous. I sure hope this works. I mean, I did what Moses said to do, but still, how do I know that my boy is going to be safe?" Habakkuk says, "Hey Mordecai, chill, man. You are fine. You did exactly what you were told to do. You have no worries." Both men go inside. Mordecai gathers his family close to him and they cower together under a blanket and sweat out the night. Habakkuk, on the other hand, pops some popcorn, and plays some games with his family, sings some songs until they all just fall asleep. Now, which one is safe? They both are! Why? They were not saved by the quality of their faith, but by the blood of the lamb. Do you see my point?

Trust Christ! You are not saved by the quality of your faith, but by the merits of his life and the sufficiency of his death. You do not have perfect faith, but he does.

B. Believers conquer through the word of their testimony.

There is much in popular culture, mainstream media, the educational system, the government and the courts that is blatantly anti-God and ant-Christ. It is in “religious denominations.” What are we supposed to do about it? Should we form a political party? Should we flood the Congressional switchboard with complaints and write letters to the editors? Do we picket and protest? What? I am not opposed to doing those sorts of things and have done them. However, I recognize that the only lasting influence upon a culture is the changing of a person’s heart by the gospel of Jesus Christ. We conquer through sharing the gospel with other people. The word of our testimony means, speaking about that which we have seen and experienced about Christ. You can do that. You can tell others what you believe about Christ, and the impact that He has made in your life. Listen, I love for you to invite people to church and for you to brag about your church, but I would rather you invite people to Jesus and brag about the gospel.

C. Believers conquer by not loving their lives, even unto death.

When we think about dying, we tend to fear dying in any sort of pain, discomfort, or limitation. We want to live with all of our strength and faculties and then die in our sleep without any suffering. We want to die conveniently. We are not going to conquer if our big goal in life is to die conveniently. We need to change our goal. Our goal in life is not to die conveniently, but to die well. Die in faith. Death with dignity is dying in Christ. It is dying without bringing shame upon the one who loved us and gave himself for us. You can die that way when you realize that death is gain. Death is the believer’s reward for perseverance. Death is the means that God has ordained for you to complete your sanctification. Don’t love your life so much that you try to keep it at the expense of living for Christ. There are some things that are more important than staying alive. Jesus believed that! He considered your salvation to be more important than his staying alive. Jesus considered the gospel to be more important than his life. Do you? Beloved, if you are not willing to live for him, do you really think that you will be willing to die for him? We are in a war and we cannot wish it away or run and hide. But know this...

IV. There will be an end to the conflict. (39b-43)

a. We are not at the end, yet.

There will be an end to the conflict. Persecution is on a leash. Tribulation has a time limit. Death will be buried. We are not there yet, but every day is a step closer to the end.

b. Unbelievers will be punished. (39b-42)

Angels are involved in the harvest, so is the Son of Man.

Revelation 14.14-20

The punishment is somber. The causes of sin (interesting) and the sinners will be thrown. They will be under authority. They will not escape. They will be terrorized. They will be sent into a place that is described as a fiery furnace. Fascinating, isn't it? In Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar threw the three Hebrew boys into the fiery furnace and who showed up in the midst of that to help them out? "One who is like a son of the gods." Here is the difference. That fiery furnace was temporary, this one is forever. That one was for believers, this one is for unbelievers. That one was marked by the presence of God in deliverance; this one is marked by the presence of God in judgment. In that one, there was no harm; in this one, there is no escape and no relief. That is hell.

c. **Believers win!** (43)

We win because Jesus already won. We win and we shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father. Do you know what that means? That means that you will look like your dad!

Conclusion:

We win because we persevere and we persevere because Jesus already won. We persevere because Jesus finished the race. We do not run because our running earns us salvation. We persevere because we have been saved. I am training to run the St. Jude Marathon in Memphis, TN. For many years I have attempted to qualify for the Boston Marathon and this past year, I finally qualified and was officially accepted to run in the 2015 Boston Marathon. So, why train and why run in the St. Jude Marathon? Why train at all, even for Boston. After all, I'm in. I've already qualified. I have the piece of paper that says, "congratulations you made it." So, why run? Why train? Why bother? I run because I am a runner. I don't run for a piece of paper.

Listen, I think that we need to be careful in how we present the gospel. We ask people if they want to go to heaven. If so, pray this prayer. Did you pray the prayer? Great, now you have the piece of paper that says you are going to go to heaven. That is not conversion! What does it mean to convert? It means to change your identity. I go from being a self-centered, self-worshipping, sinner to being a follower of Christ. I go from loving self to loving Christ. I am a Christ-follower. I am a Christian. Get it? Why do I stay faithful to Christ? Why do I bother with pursuing Christ? Why do I bother with spiritual disciplines like praying, reading the Bible, having gospel conversations and serving others? Why bother, if I am promised that I am going to go to heaven? I bother because I am a Christian! It is who I am! What I am drives what I do.

If you are a follower of Christ, you have his righteousness. That means that you are in a war with this world. That means that you are going to win. That means that you are going to shine, forever. So, press on. Press on with joy! It won't be long now.