

Parables of the Heart
“Handling the weeds in your life”

Passages: Psalm 37:1-9
 Matthew 13:24-30

‘The parable of the wheat and the weeds’ is fairly easy to understand. Back in the early days of creation, our world was like a *field of wheat ...* beautifully ordered, fruitful and full of hope! But one night (the night of Adam and Eve’s fall), God’s enemy sowed weeds into that field! As a result, the world that was once perfect in beauty, fruitfulness and order has now become a depressing sight... contaminated and sullied with sin and evil.

What’s even worse, however, is that good and evil now exist in the world in an inter-connected, inter-woven sort of way. In fact, the present reality is so bad that, if God were to try to eliminate (root out) all *the evil* from the world today, His actions would have a detrimental effect on *the good*. (We could call it “collateral damage”.) The wheat would get pulled up with the weeds!

This is *the cosmic reality* portrayed by the *‘parable of the wheat and the weeds’*.

Now, I want you to take a moment to reflect on what this means. You see, first and foremost, this parable helps us to understand (and appreciate) **the dilemma that God faces** as the population of the world increases. Unlike the days of Noah, God can no longer resolve the problem of evil in this world through a flood! *In Noah’s day*, it was easy for God to gather His righteous few on a boat and let the rest of the evil world drown. But, already *in Jesus’ day*, the numbers were too great and the interconnections too many. Now, *in our day*, the world is even that more complex! If, for example, God decided to pull up all the evil weeds tomorrow;

- How many millions of families would be seriously affected?
- How many businesses would collapse?
- How much of the global economy would fail?
- How many nations would suffer?
- How many people around the globe would panic?

By pulling out the weeds, everything that connects the people of this world to one another would undergo massive shockwaves! No wonder God waits!

But there's **another dilemma God faces**: Namely, *who are the weeds?* Even though Jesus will later tell His disciples that He was referring to the "sons of the evil one" (see verse 38), who are they? How are we to distinguish them from "the sons of the Kingdom". And even though Jesus gives us a clue back in chapter 12 when He says, "**By their fruit you will know them**", how often can you really tell? And besides, **don't we all, at one time or another, bear bad fruit?** (Hypocrisy, selfishness, deceit, arrogance, pride, greed?) **Do you see the dilemma God faces?** In order for God to eliminate all the evil in this world, He would have to eliminate all of humanity!

It's pretty clear, then, why God allows evil to exist. It is obviously more important to God that we be given the chance to have our evil hearts transformed *over time* by the influence of Christ and the power of His Spirit, rather than have evil be fully eliminated *right now*.

This is important to keep in mind whenever we're tempted to believe that God is insensitive to the problem of evil in our world. I hear a lot of people say things like; "*If God is so good, why is his world so bad? If an all-good, all-wise, all-loving, all-just, and all-powerful God is running the show, why does he seem to be doing such a miserable job of it? Why do bad things happen to good people?*" You've heard them, too.

The people who most often ask these questions are those who feel some sort of resentment towards God. He has not come through for them. They prayed for a miracle and nothing happened. They've seen earthquakes and wars and they wonder why God has allowed so many people to suffer. A young child dies in a freak accident and God seems to do nothing to stop it. (By the way, did you know that more people have abandoned their faith over these questions than for any other reason?)

Well, today's parable actually provides us with answers!

First, it tells us that **evil is not part of the original creation**. God created the world as a beautifully ordered and fruitful field of wheat. Evil is something that was later 'sown' into God's good world by Satan. Evil is Satan's weed.

Second, it tells us that **the weeds of evil only gain power when they entangle their roots with the wheat**. It's only then that the weeds can begin to strangle, corrupt, starve and, eventually, bring the wheat down. Indeed, this is why

there is suffering and death in our world. This is why we have war, violence and bloodshed. This is why there is so much marital breakdown and divorce. This is why there are so many physical, social and emotional problems in our world. When unrecognised or unattended, these weeds of evil will grow up around us, choke us and eventually pull us down. Only those who are aware of their presence and determined not to succumb to their power have a chance to resist.

Third, this parable tells us that **God's one and only solution to the problem of evil is his Son Jesus Christ**. We do not worship a God who is an absentee landlord, far removed from His wheat field. We worship a God who, in Jesus Christ, has become like us, a stalk of wheat surrounded by weeds. And yet, throughout His life on earth, He kept His eyes on Satan, alert to his deceptions and lies, *refusing to allow the weeds to contaminate Him*. He stayed upright and true to His calling as **perfect wheat!** And even though the weeds eventually succeeded in getting others to take His life by crucifixion, the weeds of evil could not hold Him in the grave. In other words, Jesus is the cosmic answer to the parable of the wheat and weeds. Not only does His resurrection prove that God is capable and powerful enough to usher in a new world order, where there are no weeds, but it empowers us with a new awareness and inner strength to resist the entanglements of evil!

It's this idea that moves the parable out of the *cosmic realm* and into the realm of the *practical and personal*. You see, when Jesus originally gave this parable to His disciples, He meant for it to help them better handle the strain and stress of their personal situation. What was their personal situation?

Let me take back to Matthew 12 for a moment. The context is very important for understanding today's parable. It seems that, only a few hours prior, Jesus had had a run-in with the Pharisees. The Pharisees accused Jesus of being an agent of Satan. (Listen to verse 24)-- ***"It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons!"*** Now, nothing like this had ever been said before about Jesus! Indeed, the Pharisees are starting to get quite bold in their public opposition to Him.

It is at this point that Jesus considers their opposition in a whole new way! A corner has been turned! And so, in verse 30, He tells His disciples, ***"He who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me scatters."*** Jesus is clear in His mind that these Pharisees are direct enemies of the

Kingdom. In His mind, *they are the weeds that Satan has wickedly sown* in God's wheat field in a deliberate attempt to disrupt the work of the harvest! They are the 'sons of the evil one'. And from now on, He is warning His disciples to be aware of their evil schemes. That's the purpose of the parable. Jesus is saying, *"Don't let your roots get entangled with theirs!"*

In the same way, as we read this parable, we must listen carefully to what it says about our **local situation**. Here are two questions for us to consider: 1) Who/what are the weeds that seek to entangle us? 2) How do we handle living in a world where our roots can potentially get entwined with the weeds of evil?

Those of you who know me know that I'm a bit of a handyman. That is, I like to fix things. If something's broken, I'll tinker with it until I either mend it or throw it out! Why do I like to fix things? I guess it's because I'm impatient with chaos and disorder. But, of course, it's not only *broken objects* that I want to repair-- I also want to repair *broken lives*. That could be one reason why I became a missionary, and then a pastor. I hate seeing people whose lives are broken and in a mess. I want to see things put right. I want to see an end to chaos and disorder. To put it in the agricultural metaphor of today's parable, **I want to help God pull up the weeds!**

And you know what? That puts me in a very dangerous place for two reasons: **First**, I can begin to believe that I am the saviour of the world! **Second**, in my enthusiasm, I can get careless and find my own roots entangled with the roots of evil.

Let me tell you a story (taken from "The Emotionally Healthy Church", pages 39-40) about **Bob Pierce**, the founder of World Vision. In 1950, Pierce started what is, today, the largest relief and development organisation in the world. Back in the early days, Bob often prayed, *"Lord, let my heart be broken by the things that break your heart."* That zeal drove Bob to the ends of the earth, marked by a seemingly inexhaustible passion to meet human needs.

Unfortunately, his approach had disastrous consequences for his family. As one family friend stated politely, Bob's wife, Lorraine, *"knew deprivation of a different kind than those to whom her husband was ministering."* The stark reality was that Bob had all but abandoned his own family by constantly

putting the opportunities for expansion and greater impact ahead of his wife and children. Even when one of his daughters attempted suicide, instead of coming home, he booked a flight to Vietnam. *“I knew he wouldn’t come”*, his daughter would say several years later. Soon after, she succeeded in taking her life.

By the final year of his life, at the age of sixty-four, Bob had alienated himself from everyone in his immediate family. Bob’s often cited request, *“Just let me burn out for God”*, was sadly being fulfilled.

Can you see why today’s parable speaks so powerfully to me? In effect, God is saying to me, *“Bart, what you and Kim do is good and kind—but don’t ever believe that your efforts to pull out the weeds of evil will save the world! Rather, recognise the reality that the weeds will keep coming back, regardless of what you do! Recognise that you have limits. Recognise that you need your own time and space to keep the weeds from entangling the roots of your marriage and family and personal walk with God. Of course, I don’t want you to stop reaching out and caring for others. But as you do, remember one thing—**Only I can save the world...**for the fact is that a perfect solution to the evil in this world will only come at the end of time, when I return!”*

And you know what? It’s the same advice that God had been giving to His people for a very long time. Listen to Psalm 37:

¹ ***Do not fret because of those who are evil
or be envious of those who do wrong;
² for like the grass they will soon wither,
like green plants they will soon die away.***

⁷ ***Be still before the LORD
and wait patiently for him;
do not fret when people succeed in their ways,
when they carry out their wicked schemes.***

There’s one last thing that this parable forces us to consider. **The fact that God is waiting, delaying the day when He pulls up the weeds, is actually something for which we must be thankful!** By allowing evil to continue, God is giving more time for people all around the world to come to know Him. Clearly, in God’s eyes, this is the “lesser of two evils”, allowing this world to

continue to experience the transitory suffering that comes with evil in order that many more people will come to Him and find new life! The apostle Peter understood this when he said, ***“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.”***

And so, when you think about the evil in the world, and you begin to get upset, take a moment to think about the 19 people who were baptised on Easter Sunday. Even though God has all the power necessary to bring an end to all the evil in this world today, even though he could pull up the weeds from His wheat field, **He chooses to wait...**to wait for as many people as possible to come and make their peace with him.

The big question for us is, *“Are we ready to wait with God?”* Emotionally, are we able to handle the weeds and put up with the mess?

Psychologists tell us that impatience generally springs out of a person’s desire to control things! We don’t like living in the in-between time. We don’t like the conflicts we face each day. We don’t like dealing with a messy world.

The solution to our impatience is learning to trust that God’s timing and purpose is perfect. Instead of trying to save the world ourselves, it’s time that we trust in Jesus, the only Saviour, pushing down our own roots deeply into Him. In the end, only He can pull up the weeds!

Let’s pray.