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Sermon Notes

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The Wheat and the Weeds: The Present Torment of the Righteous and the Future Torment of the Wicked

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

I. Struggling With an Impure World

Illus. My anniversary date... tripping silent alarms set because of terrorists

Question: How much suffering comes to us because of being constantly surrounded by unbelievers

- It is unbelievers who make police forces, courts, laws, jails necessary in the numbers they are
- It is because of unbelievers that so many laws need to be written
- It is unbelievers in Hollywood and New York that plan how to assault us with immoral images to make a buck
- It is unbelievers in foreign lands who arrest, imprison, torture and murder Christians
- It is unbelievers that make the alluring, sinful, enticing system known in Pilgrim's Progress as "Vanity Fair"
- It is unbelievers that make even going shopping in the mall a potentially negative and maybe even dangerous excursion

A. The Struggle of Righteous Lot

Abraham's nephew, living in wicked Sodom, surrounded daily by immorality and filth

2 Peter 2:8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—

A picture of the children of God in this present age... tormented in our righteous souls by lawlessness

Tormented 1) because of the evil itself; 2) because of the effect it has on our souls... constantly dragging us down, seeking to pollute us with filth and with lawlessness

An ancient problem: Enoch, seventh from Adam:

Jude 14-15 Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

Enoch "walked with God" every day... but he knew well the suffering of being surrounded by ungodly men who sought to drag him down and pull him away from God

B. Adam's Descendants: A Mixed Race

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

1. The Sons of God: The Godly line who call on the name of the Lord
2. The Sons of the Serpent: The devilish line
3. A Long History of Hostility

1 John 3:12 Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

Proverbs 29:27 The righteous detest the dishonest; the wicked detest the upright.

C. The Call to Perfect Purity

1. Surrounded by a Filthy World We're Not Called to Leave
2. Commanded to Thrive and Be Holy

D. The Call to Evangelize... for some wheat lives a lot like weeds

1. God is not desiring to remove all the weeds
2. In one sense, we all start out as weeds and are transformed to be wheat

E. Context of this Parable

1. Explaining Kingdom Truth
2. Parables Both Conceal and Reveal

3. Basic Concept

Kingdom of Heaven grows and flourishes surrounded by constant human opposition, advancing in a mixed world made up of children of God and children of the Devil, and it will be that way until the end of the world. Thus the children of the Kingdom are tormented and tested daily by being surrounded by ungodly enemies of the Kingdom. However, at the end of the world this mixed experience will end forever: the wicked will be tormented forever in hell, while the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.

This parable explains the halting and struggling progress of the Kingdom... a mixed history of three steps forward two steps back... a constant struggle on the human level, surrounded by people who hate us, who seek to allure us away from God, who do damage and hurt to our souls by their ungodly example and clever enticements based on the lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and boastful pride of life.

II. The Kingdom and the World in the Present Age: Wheat and Weeds Mixed Together

A. The Parable Stated, Then Explained

vs. 24-30 "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 root up 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.'"

1. Parables conceal... when not explained to the ungodly
2. Parables reveal... when explained to spiritual beggars
3. Jesus "Leaves the Crowd"... Very Significant Separation
4. Disciples the Spiritual Beggars...

vs. 36 *Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."*

to them the secrets of the Kingdom are explained

5. Parable not intuitively obvious

In the first parable, the Seed is the Message About the Kingdom... in this parable, the good seed are the Sons of the Kingdom (i.e. Christians)

Martin Luther: "...Who could have discovered such an interpretation, seeing that in this parable he calls people the seed and the world the field; although in the parable preceding this one he defines the seed to be the Word of God and the field the people or the hearts of the people. If Christ Himself had not here interpreted this parable, everyone would have imitated his explanation of the previous parable... and the Savior's object and understanding of it would have been lost."

B. Details Recounted

1. The Son of Man Plants Sons of the Kingdom

vs. 24 *"The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field."*

vs. 37 *"The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man."*

- a. "Son of Man" is Christ's preferred title for Himself
- b. comes from Daniel's vision in Daniel 7
- c. after His resurrection, He has authority over the Kingdom to build it and to rule it

Revelation 1:12-16 *And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. 15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance*

- d. at the end of the world, He will have authority to judge every single human being

John 5:26-27 *For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. 27 And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.*

2. The Field is the World

vs. 38 *The field is the world*

- a. key interpretive issue... the field is NOT the church
- b. long history of misunderstanding on this issue

Early church fathers

Constantine's settlement: forced entire populace to convert to Christianity on pain of death... This set up the long blending of church and state and led to immense problems with unregenerate church membership, and led to medieval idea of Christendom: the visible church completely mixed with earthly politics

Augustine's battle against the Donatists: (they were overzealous in excommunication of people who had compromised during time of persecution... Augustine went so far as to say mixture of good and evil within the church is a necessary sign of the church!!

John Calvin: taught that the field was the church

Bailey Smith: I am convinced that one of America's greatest problems is that of unconverted church members. Our churches are filled with people who profess Christ, but who do not possess Him. They claim His name, but they have never submitted to His Person. They want His blessings without His authority. They want His favor without His leadership. They want Him to accept their will for their lives instead of submitting to His will for their lives. [In famous sermon, "Wheat and the Tares"]

The "mixed" nature of the world is here established... the church is not directly in view here

HOWEVER... surrounded so closely by weeds constantly, the church must make constant efforts against the infiltration of false believers into their midst... the fact they look so much like Christians makes it all the harder

3. The Evil One Plants Sons of the World

Illus. Common enough occurrence in ancient Rome that they had a law against planting weeds in someone else's field

- a. constant, ongoing process
- b. devil is the enemy of the Kingdom
- c. greatest strategy is infiltration of the world and influence of the church

4. The Wheat's Fruitfulness Exposes the Weeds Fruitlessness

- a. it's when the wheat sprouts and bears its fruit that the weeds are exposed
- b. spiritually: when the true Christians grow to maturity, they bear the fruit discussed in previous parable... the tares never do

5. The Master's Intentional Strategy: "Let Both Grow Together..."

- a. perplexed question by servants

vs. 27-29 *"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?'"*

b. note: servants never identified in parable

i) possibly angels... since the later servants (harvesters) are angels

ii) possibly human leaders: either government or church

Illus.: Church history of efforts to “weed” the earth:

After Constantine’s conversion in 312, the official state religion of the Roman Empire was Christianity... but the Roman government was too absolutist to give up control over religion... it simply meant that now pagan religions would be persecuted.

Not long after that, Theodosius the Great became emperor, coming to power toward the end of the battle against Arianism (which we know today as Jehovah’s Witnesses... who teach that Jesus was a created being and not God). In order to battle the Arian doctrine, Theodosius issued the following edict in 381:

“We order that adherents of this faith be called ‘Catholic Christians;’ we brand all the senseless followers of other religions with the infamous name of ‘heretics,’ and forbid their conventicles assuming the name of churches. Besides the condemnation of divine justice, they must expect the heavy penalties which our authority, guided by heavenly wisdom, shall think proper to inflict.”

This included burning heretics whenever it thought necessary

Thus began the practice of the Catholic Church trying to weed the world of weeds by burning people it deemed heretics

Balthasar Hubmaier (1480-1528) was an ordained Catholic priest who held a doctorate in theology. In the mid-1520s he moved quickly from Catholicism to magisterial Protestantism and finally to Anabaptism. He wrote “On heretics and those who burn them” in 1524

Not until Balthasar Hubmaier’s was there a cogent argument against burning heretics in Europe

Hubmaier wrote: “Divine truth is immortal, and though it may sometimes be imprisoned, scourged, crucified, and buried, it will arise again in victory in the third day and reign in triumph through all eternity.” Therefore, the church should not burn heretics, but should rather refute their false doctrines and leave their final punishment to God

In the end, the Catholic Church found this good brother guilty of heresy and executed him by burning on March 10, 1528. Three days later they executed his loving wife by putting a stone around her neck and throwing her in the Danube River.

c. the apostles John and James... “Sons of Thunder”

Luke 9:52-56 He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. 53 But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. 54 When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; 56 for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." And they went on to another village.

- d. it is God's intention that the church should survive, thrive, do its ministry in a direct conflict and struggle with a constantly opposing world
- e. it is as the church suffers this abuse, this torture, this opposition that it shows its true nature and acts the role of "more than conquerors"

6. The Master's Motive: The Survival and Benefit of the Wheat

vs. 29-30 "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest.

- a. REASON #1: the wheat and weeds difficult to tell apart in the early stages

Illus. "Tares" or "weeds" probably bearded darnel

Bearded darnel is an annual plant that occurs as a hated weed in grain fields, waste places, moist farm fields, and along roadsides. The stiff, round, hollow stalk grows to a height of 1 to 3 feet and bears long, linear, flat leaves that are rolled up when young.

It is a poisonous herb, and looks very much like wheat in its early stages

Illus. Many Christians look just like weeds in the early stages of their lives

- Saul of Tarsus was a blasphemer and a persecutor of the church, breathing out threat and murder against the Lord's disciples
- George Mueller was a juvenile delinquent... robbing his father's government salary and being thrown in jail
- John Newton was a slave trader, a drunkard, and an immoral man
- BULLETIN PICTURE!!!

The mission field is filled with people who are not presently Christians, but who are elect of God and who will someday come to faith... if all the weeds were rooted up now, there would be no one left to evangelize

Also, the root system of the tares wraps itself and intertwines with the wheat... ultimately, it is to the wheat's advantage to leave the tares in place

b. REASON #2: it is better for the WHEAT to leave the tares alone

the wise master knows the tares will not have an ultimately damaging effect on the wheat

Actually, it's better for the wheat in the end... all of the trials we face that cause us to grow in our faith, to be purified from our independence and love for the world

James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

The horrible torture that weeds put the true children through provides the glorious context for the heroic martyrs to do their witnessing work

III. The Future Separation: Judgment Day

vs. 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."

A. The Mixed Status is NOT Permanent

1. What is good for the present age is NOT good for eternity

vs. 39 The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

2. At the end of the age, the full history will have been revealed... no further development permitted
3. Judgment Day is coming... then the weeds will be pulled up by the root
4. Angelic reapers... delighted in the purifying work to be done

B. The Son of Man: Lord of the Future Harvest

1. Present harvest... children of God brought into the Kingdom

Matthew 9:37-38 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

The "Lord of the Harvest" at present is God the Son... who sends out His disciples around the world to bring people into the Kingdom:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..."

John 20:21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

2. Lord of the Future harvest: The wicked and evil weeded out of His Kingdom

vs. 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."

First... the weeds are gathered to be burned...

vs. 40-43 "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 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. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where 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.

Christ wants a perfectly pure Kingdom, with no evil people and no "stumbling blocks" (more about that in a moment)

The harvest time will come with a dreadful wrath poured out on the earth... and Christ is Lord of that harvest as well:

Revelation 14:14-19 I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. 15 Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." 16 So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested. 17 Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 18 Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud

voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." 19 The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath.

Christ, seated on the cloud, swings His sickle and harvests the earth

Christ also sends out angels and they accomplish the harvest as well

3. Every foul plant removed... forever

Matthew 15:13 He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots.

C. Wheat Gathered into the Barn

Matthew 24:31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

Matthew 3:12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

IV. The Eternal State: A Pure and Glorious Kingdom

A. The Future Torment of the Wicked

vs. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

1. Unquenchable fire... an eternity of torment

- a. non-Christians assume that hell will be some kind of fun place where they can hang out with their friends
- b. no fellowship possible when they're constantly screaming and gnashing their teeth

2. The Eternity of Hell... clearly taught

Revelation 14:11 And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night

Revelation 21:8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars-- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

B. The Future Glory of the Righteous

vs. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

1. One of the clearest verses on the radiance that will be ours in our glorified state
2. This is the glory of the resurrection body... shining like the sun

1 Corinthians 15:43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power

Romans 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Romans 8:23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

ILLUS. C.S. Lewis Quote from "Weight of Glory"

3. Moses' face shone from being temporarily in God's presence
4. Our whole bodies will radiate with God's glory in heaven

2 Corinthians 3:18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

C. A Pure and Glorious Kingdom

1. Present world is terribly mixed
2. Future kingdom is perfectly pure

Note: "The field is the world

vs. 38 The field is the world

BUT THEN

vs. 41 *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.*

At last, the world and the Kingdom will be one and the same... perfectly pure!!

Revelation 11:15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

The constant request of the Lord's prayer is at last answered: His will is done on earth as it is in heaven

3. Eternal state... no more temptation

vs. 41 *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.*

- a. all "stumbling blocks" removed forever...
- b. the world, the flesh and the devil all gone
- c. internal tendency to sin tied to our old bodies GONE FOREVER
- d. the Kingdom will be pure forever

He who has ears, let him hear.

V. Application

A. Pray for Protection from the Unbelievers

John 17:11-12 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name-- the name you gave me-- so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

John 17:15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

1. Protection from pollution for you and your brothers and sisters

2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

2. Protection from persecution for the church worldwide

Romans 15:31 Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there,

B. Trust God's Sustaining Grace: Sufficient to Get us Through

1. God is able to save us through this wicked world
2. Trust that He will keep you protected

C. Accept the Wisdom of God in Allowing the World to be Mixed

1. God's ways are not our ways
2. God's wisdom is perfect... thank Him for allowing the wheat and weeds to grow up together
3. Rejoice that the church is out of the heretic-burning business
4. Do not be surprised when the world hates you and rejects your entire worldview

D. Never Accept a Mixed Church!!!!

2 Corinthians 6:17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."

1. Strive that the church be as much as possible pure from unbelievers
2. This is the very purpose of believer's baptism and church discipline

E. Stay Active in Evangelism

1. You can't tell the difference between wheat that hasn't developed yet and tares

Bulletin picture: God is willing to pour out His children unto death to bring about the conversion of persecutors

2. Be active in preaching/living the gospel... let God's amazing grace do its transforming work