

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com)
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Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 (read only vv.24-30) “Why Doesn’t God Put an End to Evil?”

Intro. Have you ever wondered why God hasn’t yet intervened to put an end to evil? He certainly has the power to do so. At any moment He could send Jesus with millions of angels to judge the wicked and establish His kingdom. Why doesn’t He do it? Have you wondered why Jesus didn’t set up an earthly kingdom long ago? Many Jews rejected Him because He did not. Instead, He allowed evil Rome to continue their reign over Israel and the rest of the world. And why have almost 2,000 years passed, and Christ still has not returned? Well I am going to deal with such questions from my text today.

Chapter 13 of Matthew contains seven of the parables that Jesus spoke to describe various aspects of the kingdom period between His first coming and His second coming. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. According to vv.11-15, Jesus started speaking in parables because most of the people had rejected His plain teaching. Fortunately, we have our Lord’s own interpretation of His parable in vv.36-43.

Our parable today explains the apparent contradiction between the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, and what Jesus turned out to be. The Old Testament, and John the Baptist, prophesied that the Messiah would judge the wicked, and save the righteous, and set up an earthly kingdom of peace and justice. But Jesus Christ did not do that. Is He therefore not the Messiah? In fact, John the Baptist must have wondered about this, for He sent messengers to Jesus, asking if He is indeed the Messiah they were looking for. So this parable gives the reason why Jesus did not immediately fulfill such Jewish Messianic expectations. And this morning we are going to solve to some degree the mystery of why He hasn’t already put an end to evil, and set up His earthly Kingdom. So let’s look at this passage together and we will see first of all:

I. THE MISSION OF JESUS

I’m convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, and He was sent by God to accomplish a mission. And what is that mission? Well our text gives us some clues. According to v.24, His actions are intended to establish the Kingdom of God, which is first of all the establishment of the rule of God over people. So Jesus came to bring men and women, boys and girls, under the rule of God. The Gospel of Matthew has many references to this. Mt. 4:23 says, “And Jesus went about all Galilee... preaching the gospel of the kingdom...” He taught us to pray in Mt. 6:10, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” He said in Mt. 7:21, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” So the mission of Jesus was to establish the rule of God over our lives. And when we repent of sin, and yield to the Lordship of Christ, then according to v.38, we become “sons of the kingdom,” i.e. children of God.

Today, the Kingdom of God finds expression within the church and the lives of believers. A true church is a group of people who have repented of sin, believed in Jesus, and yielded their lives to the Lordship of Christ. Christ is the Head of the Church. He reigns over His people from the throne in heaven. And we are to obey Him. There is still a future, earthly manifestation of the Kingdom of God over the whole earth. But right now, the Kingdom of God is limited to heaven, and to the hearts of believers.

So Christ wants to establish His kingdom over your heart. And I can assure you that God can run your life a whole lot better than you can. Wherever Jesus is King, there is peace and blessing.

But there's a problem. Most people have not surrendered to Jesus as Lord, and they don't want to. So let's see:

A. The Means of Accomplishing this Mission – How is Christ going to establish His kingdom in this world? Now according to v.24, He does it by sowing “good seed in his field.” And in v.38 the good seed refers to “the sons of the kingdom.” In other words, Christ is spreading His Kingdom in this world by winning people to faith in Him and placing believers in various communities all over the world. Ever since Pentecost the Lord has been sowing generation after generation of His saints into the world. They are scattered everywhere (cf. Acts 8:1).

Now there is an important lesson born out by v.30. The servants wanted to uproot and remove the tares, but the landowner said in v.30, “Let both grow together until the harvest....” Now according to v.38, the wheat represents God's people, while the tares represent unbelievers, who are aligned with Satan. And notice that until Jesus comes again, God expects us to live among unbelievers. I can think of no other purpose for this than to be a witness to unbelievers. We are not to isolate ourselves from unbelievers. While not partaking in their sins, we need to be intentional about cultivating relationships with them. Then we need to look for opportunities to share our faith and the Word of God with them. We need to lead people to surrender their lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

George and Helen Angone are former members of our church who bought a place in south Florida. It's a retirement community. They shared with some of us one time about how they have been able to be a witness to the residents in that little community. Helen ministered to a lady who had lost her husband. She gave the woman her own Bible, who began reading it every day. George does a lot for the people in that community, and many have a hard time understanding why he would do so much good for people, and not expect anything in return. Well you see, they understand the principle that Jesus is teaching here. God expands His kingdom by planting us among unbelievers.

So think twice about leaving a job or a neighborhood just because you are among unbelievers. Today there are people leaving cities like New York, Chicago, Portland, and Seattle, largely because of the lawlessness of those cities. Yet if all believers leave, who will be left to witness for Christ?

B. The Extent of this Mission – In v.38 Jesus says, “The field is the world.” In the parable the field belongs to the master, and thus the world belongs to Christ. He is the rightful owner. And so Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven is to spread through the whole earth, and not just Israel. In fact, when Jesus later commissioned His disciples, He commanded them to make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:19). He told them to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8).

This is the mission that we have received from Jesus. We are to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth. We are to continue this mission of calling upon people to repent of their sin, and trust in Jesus as Savior, and yield to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We must continue to send out missionaries. We must continue to support the spread of the Gospel. And to a large degree this mission has been fulfilled, just as Jesus indicated. There are very few nations left that do not have a single believer. Yet there are still many tribes and local communities where the sons of the Kingdom have not been planted as Gospel witnesses. We need to do more to carry out the mission of our Lord. Our International Mission Board has been seeking to do with very thing.

Where does God want to plant you? You may be the only Christian in your family but God has placed you there to be a witness for Him. You may go to a job that is surrounded by unbelievers. When I worked in a paper mill as a young preacher, what a contrast I was to the workers I worked with! Young people, are you willing to be a witness for Christ at school? Will you be a missionary to your neighborhood? Are you willing to cultivate a friendship with an unbeliever? Better yet, are you willing to go on the mission field to another city or country where the need is greater?

Ah, but in contrast to the mission of Jesus, we see in this parable:

II. THE MISSION OF SATAN

In v.25 Jesus speaks of the enemy of the landowner. In v.39 He identifies the enemy as the Devil. Jesus believed in a personal devil, and He taught about him. He is the great adversary. He seeks to hurt the landowner by sowing bad seed in his field. As for the historical possibility of this, according to William Barclay there was a time in India when one of the direst threats which a man can make to his enemy is, "I will sow bad seed in your field."

Now the enemy in this parable was truly evil. He was animated by malice and hatred. He would not benefit from his evil act. It was purely an act of hatred. Even so, Satan hates God and seeks to disrupt everything God does. You can count on him to oppose, hinder, and counter the work of God with tireless persistence. He is pure evil. Furthermore, this enemy is cowardly. He waits until everybody is fast asleep, so that he will not be seen and caught. Even so, the devil is sneaky and deceitful. 2 Cor. 11:14 says that "Satan ... transforms himself into an angel of light." He doesn't show his true colors, so to speak.

V.39 is relevant to the question of the origin of evil. Where does wickedness and misery come from? In v.27 the servants of the landowner said, "Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field?" Of course he only sowed good seed. Even so, God only sows good seed. He only does good. Then the servants ask, "How then does it have tares?" In v.28 the owner says, "An enemy has done this." And v.39 says, "The enemy that sowed them is the devil." God is not the source of evil; the devil is!

Now as we seek to carry on the mission of Jesus, we need to understand that we have an enemy as well. Satan will oppose us every step of the way. And we need to understand the methods of Satan, so we may be prepared to fight against his diabolical schemes. In 2 Cor. 2:11 the apostle Paul says, "lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices." So what are the methods of Satan? How does he seek to destroy the work of God? Now the primary method mentioned in this parable is this:

A. Sowing His "Sons" among God's People – Jesus says in the last of v.38, "the tares are the sons of the wicked one." Now to understand the parable, you must understand the meaning of "tares." The traditional rendering "tares" for the Greek word (*zizanian*) is unfortunate. It actually refers to a grassy weed called bearded darnel, which in its earlier stages is indistinguishable from wheat (v.26). They look just alike. So the devil's method is that of mingling the counterfeit with the real. When the "wheat" of God is sown in the world, the devil places his children in the midst of what God has sown. In other words, wherever Christ sows a true Christian, Satan comes and sows a counterfeit. He began in the days of the apostles. Judas and Simon Magus were just two of the examples of darnel among the wheat.

Even so, people today can outwardly appear to be Christians, but Jesus warns that some are not true believers, though they profess faith and are religiously active. Jesus has already warned in Mt. 7:15, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are

ravenous wolves.” A person may look like a Christian, go to church like a Christian, and even talk like a Christian, but not be a Christian!

Well how can we tell if someone is a wolf in sheep’s clothing? Or how can we tell if someone is like a tare, instead of wheat? Jesus said earlier, “By their fruit you shall know them.” Just watch what happens over time. You see, it is not until the wheat and the tares produce grain is it possible to distinguish them.¹ The darnel produces grains that are black or grey, in contrast to the light brown color of wheat. Even so, time will tell from the fruit of their lives. Jesus said in John 8:31, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.” So another application of the reality of tares among wheat is that we must be on our guard and pray against such plans to infiltrate the church, especially with unsaved leaders that would lead us astray (Acts 20:30).

B. Producing Bad Results - The devil accomplishes the following negative results by sowing counterfeit believers among us:

1. Some Falsely Assume They Are Saved – There are plenty of tares that look like wheat, and there are plenty of people who outwardly look and act like Christians, and so they think they are Christians. Therefore in Mt. 7:22 Jesus said, “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’” And yet Jesus says that they will be cast out. They will not go to heaven. So examine your heart, and make sure you are not just a tare among the wheat, so to speak.

2. God’s Work Is Hurt and Weakened – Satan sows unbelievers everywhere, including into the membership of churches. He sowed unbelievers into Israel as well. The mixed multitude became a snare to the people of Israel. They rebelled against Moses’ leadership. They spread unbelief. They set a bad example to others regarding idolatry and immorality. And just as the mixed multitude caused problems for the people of Israel, they cause problems in the church. The devil can use a hypocrite in the church to a much greater advantage than He can a person who lives in sin and does not profess to be a Christian.²

Before I move on, I want to make an appeal to anyone who is not yet a Christian. Don’t allow the presence of hypocrites keep you from Christ, or keep you from coming to church. Jesus warned that there would be hypocrites and counterfeits among God’s people. I can assure you that you will not be able to use the presence of hypocrites among God’s people as an excuse at the Day of Judgment.

So we have seen the mission of Jesus, and in contrast to that, we’ve seen the mission of Satan. Now let’s consider:

III. THE MYSTERY OF THE KINGDOM

In this parable Jesus is revealing something that was unknown, and unforeseen in the Old Testament, or even by John the Baptist. The mystery is indicated in the element of surprise stated in v.27, “Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?” The servants were surprised by the presence of the tares, and that there are so many. What may have been even

¹ V.26 says, “But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.” It’s not that the tares sprouted only after the wheat produced a crop, but it was not until the wheat matured enough to produce grain did the tares “appear” (*phaino*) or “become evident.”

² This is one reason why Baptists believe that only saved, born again people should be members of a church. And back in the old days you had to give some evidence that you were a true believer before you were accepted as a member of a Baptist Church. And if you ever gave evidence by your life that you were not a Christian, you would be given opportunity to repent. And if you did not, you would be dismissed from the membership of the church!

more surprising was the fact that the master told them to leave the tares alone, and not try to remove them from the field.

Now what's the parallel to the present manifestation of the Kingdom of God?

A. The Mystery Stated - Well Jesus the Messiah has come, the Kingdom of God has begun in the hearts of His followers, but we learn here that Satan and unbelievers who promote evil are not going to be uprooted and removed until the end of the age. Jesus said in v.30, "Let both grow together until the harvest..." This is the mystery of the kingdom. This was shocking to the audience of Jesus. The crowd had heard John the Baptist's fiery prophecies of the king who would come, winnowing fan in hand, to "purge His floor," and were looking for a kingdom which was to be inaugurated by swift destruction of the wicked. But that is not the way the kingdom of heaven was to be founded by Jesus and grow. Right now, the Kingdom of God grows almost imperceptibly to the world. The Kingdom of Satan is not now being overthrown with violence and an overwhelming display of God's power. It will not gradually wane and disappear. In fact, many New Testament Scriptures indicate that evil will get worse and worse, with the greatest intensity of evil occurring during the Great Tribulation. Yet according to vv.40-41, there *will* come a time when Jesus will come again, and He will purge this world of Satan, and of all evil. This is the mystery of the parable of the tares.

Now what does this mean to us? Well, true believers have received God's reign and have already begun to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom age. Yet, we must be patient while we continue to live in this evil age, and intermingle with the wicked of society. We have been waiting almost 2,000 years now. So until Jesus comes again, we must rub shoulders with the wicked. We must go into their shops, buy their products, work alongside them, and in many other ways deal with them. Jesus said in John 17:15, "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one." So we must not partake of their wickedness. We must always separate ourselves from the *sins* of the world, without separating ourselves from the sinners of the world. This also means that we should expect spiritual warfare throughout this age. I hate to disappoint you, but things could get harder before they get much better with the return of Jesus.

B. The Mystery Justified – Why didn't God judge the world and establish an earthly kingdom back in the first century? Why does He seem to do nothing about the presence of evil in the world? Why does He seem to do nothing while evil seems to be growing worse? Well notice that the Master told the servants in vv.29-30 to leave the tares alone, and let them grow alongside the true believers during this present age.³ There are several reasons why Christ has chosen to follow the approach He has taken:

1. To Keep from Hurting the Righteous – In v.28 the servants wanted to pull up and gather the tares. But in v.29 the master says, "No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them." You see, the good wheat could be hurt by pulling up the darnel, for their roots would be too interlaced.

Even so, if we act like the crusaders and try to attack or kill unbelievers in the name of God, we will be the ones who end up getting hurt, as well as the cause of Christ. Furthermore, some

³ Is this prohibition, then, meant to forbid the attempt to keep the Church membership pure from un-Christian members? First of all, the field is not the church but the world (v.38a). Jesus is talking about tares in the world, not tares mixed in the church. No doubt, tares are in the Church, and the parable has a bearing on it, but its lesson is much wider. We are not to try to uproot the tares from the face of the earth. As we shall see, that is the role of Christ at his second coming. So this parable is not relevant to the subject of church discipline.

professing Christians through the years have sought to uproot true believers and used the power of the state to even kill them! For example, the Anabaptists and our Baptist forefathers were tortured and persecuted even to death because the established church considered them heretics. The established church was wrong and much bloodshed would have been avoided if they had taken heed to this parable.

2. To Keep from Destroying Those Who May *Become* Righteous - Even though this reason is not specifically stated in the parable, this is a truth that should be considered. Do you want to know why Jesus hasn't come again? Do you know why judgment hasn't yet fallen upon this wicked world? Jesus said the field is the world and until the world has been reached, He will not come again according to Mt. 24:14. Furthermore, Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." We must remember the contrasting purposes of the first coming of Jesus and His Second Coming. John 3:17 says, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." This is the age of grace and salvation. Right now we are to be about leading people to repentance and faith in Christ. We need to focus on *converting* the wicked, not judging them.

Finally, we see from this parable the truth of:

IV. THE MANIFESTATION OF THE KINGDOM

Presently, King Jesus and His Kingdom is hidden from the eyes of unbelievers. They are spiritually blind. But someday the mystery of the kingdom will end, and the full manifestation of the kingdom of God will begin. This will take place at the Second Coming of Christ. Yes, this present evil age will not continue forever. V.39 refers to the end⁴ of the age. What a glorious day that will be! And when Jesus comes again, at least 3 long-awaited prophecies of the Old Testament will be fulfilled.

A. The Wicked Will be Judged - Someday there will be an end of the "mixed society." Jesus says in v.40, "Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age." Though the final judgment of the wicked has been delayed, it is nevertheless sure to come. A day of reckoning is coming. You cannot run from God eternally. This world belongs to God. It doesn't belong to you, or to the Communists, or to any dictators. And He has a right to remove all the evil and corruption from it. Furthermore, a righteous God must ultimately remove evil. There cannot be a kingdom of righteousness and peace on this world unless God removes evil.

Then He warns in vv.41-42 that the angels will assist Him by taking those who practice lawlessness (24:31), and "will cast them into the furnace of fire" (3:11; 5:22). Have you ever seen a red-hot furnace at a steel mill? Well that gives you a picture of what hell will be like.

A faithful Scottish preacher once had occasion to pass a factory where glass was manufactured. Finding the door open, he stepped in. Soon he stood before the cavernous opening of the furnace. He stared at the seething flames as if hypnotized, and finally exclaimed to himself: "Oh, that must be what hell is like!" He did not know that a stoker, standing quietly a few feet behind him, heard his words.

After several weeks, the workman appeared in church. Making himself known after the service, he reminded the preacher of the incident at the factory and said: "Every time I have opened

⁴ The word translated "end" is *sunteleia*, which means "closing time." It denotes the joining of two ages, the closing of one age leading on to the beginning of the next [Phillips].

the furnace since then, I have thought of your words. I came tonight to take Jesus as my Lord and Savior. I don't want to find out what hell is like!"⁵

And notice that Jesus says about hell in v.42. This punishment will be so great that "there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."⁶ These words describe both sorrowful despair and rage, for there is no end to it. They will be gnashing their teeth in anger. Who will they be angry with? Many will be angry at God, even though as we shall see, He is perfectly just in sending them to a devil's hell. Or perhaps they will also be gnashing their teeth in anger at every so-called friend or church hypocrite who led them down the wrong path to a devil's hell. Yet in most cases they should be angry at themselves. They will have all eternity to think of every opportunity they had to trust in Christ as Savior, and they let the opportunity pass by.

Is God just in condemning people to hell? Judge for yourself. Notice one description of such people in the last of v.41, "they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness." Such people are described as those who "offend." This refers to those who cause others to stumble, such as with a hypocritical life, or by being a bad influence. Don't be the one who causes someone else to wind up in hell. Can you think of any fire that would be hotter than for a man in hell to hear the voice of his son saying, "Dad, I followed you down here"? This is a solemn thing.⁷ Furthermore, all who are lawless will be assigned to hell (7:23). We have little problem understanding why lawless criminals are condemned to hell. Yes, unrepentant murderers, rapists, and robbers will be there. Hitler will be there. But they are not the only lawless ones. If you do not submit to the Lordship of Christ over your life, that is your destiny. Furthermore, it is *necessary* to remove such people. In the parable the tares are poisonous.⁸ If God did not separate out unrepentant sinners, heaven would not be a perfect place. Rev. 21:27 says regarding heaven, "But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." (cf. Rev. 21:8; 22:15).

What does this solemn truth mean for us? First, you should not let another day go by until you know for sure that you are "wheat" instead of a "tare?" Have you just been a Christian outwardly, instead of inwardly? A few years ago the Barna Research Group found that just ½ of 1 percent of U.S. adults said they expect to go to hell when they die, while 64 percent predicted they will end up in heaven. I'm afraid that a lot of people are deceiving themselves! Second, this parable calls upon us to rescue the perishing. After all, Jesus Christ Himself says that there is a burning hell. He spoke more about Hell than He did about Heaven. I don't like hearing about hell. But I must believe Jesus, for He worked miracles like no other man. He rose from the grave. He has impacted this world more than any other man. And the Church needs to get back to being a rescue mission for the lost. Too often we've become entertainers instead of evangelists.

Why should you get involved in reaching the lost, and supporting the missionary cause of Christ? Well this parable also teaches that:

B. The Righteous will be Rewarded – Jesus said in v.43, "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." The Kingdom that is present but hidden from the world will yet be manifested in glory. I believe that Jesus is referring to the prophecy of Dan. 12:3: "They that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament...." Right now the world does

⁵ *Pulpit Helps*, March 2005, p.32.

⁶ See also Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28.

⁷ [McGee on Rev. 20].

⁸ Naturalists tell us that the inner coats of dandelion often harbor fungus growths and that the seeds, if eaten, can cause dizziness, vomiting, and even death.

not recognize us, just as they did not recognize the true identity of Jesus. But the day is coming when we shall shine somewhat like Christ did on the mount of transfiguration. The glory of God will radiate from us.

And who is it that will be rewarded with such splendor? Well that same prophecy in Daniel says it is “they that turn many to righteousness.” Based on Hebrew parallelism, these are the ones who are wise, and who will shine with God’s glory. In fact, Prov. 11:30 says, “...he who wins souls is wise.” Is there anyone you can name who is going to heaven because of your witness, and your life? Oh, let us work ‘til Jesus comes. Let us rescue the perishing, and care for the dying. The time of Christ’s return is drawing nigh. The opportunity to win people to Christ may be over soon. A wonderful reward is awaiting those who labor, and turn others to God.

C. The Kingdom of God Will Be Established on Earth – In v.43 Jesus said, “Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” No more shall Satan rule. No more shall evil dictators rule. No more shall partisan, corrupt politicians rule. No more shall injustice reign, for Jesus shall reign on the earth as King of kings, and Lord of lords! Praise the Lord! Even so, come Lord Jesus!

Conclusion: I want to conclude this message the way Jesus did. He said in the last of v.43, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” Christ solemnly bids us to heed the message of this parable. What Jesus says here is solemn truth with grave consequences. You had better give heed to these words of Jesus. I believe we are drawing near to the return of Christ and the fulfillment of the prophecy of our Scripture text. Are you ready?

Sources: Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2020; Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Vol. 3, (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1971); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); John Philips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [Ver. 5:30]* (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, reprint, Christian Publishing Co.; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980); Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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