

The Story of a Very Mixed Field!

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[0 : 0 0] This reading is from page 979 of the Pew Bibles, starting with Matthew chapter 13, verses 24 to 30, and then 36 to 43.

The parable of the weeds. Jesus told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.

When the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared. 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?

An enemy did this, he replied. The servants asked him, Do you want us to go and pull them up? No, he answered, because while you are pulling up the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them.

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 : 1 7] And on the next page. The parable of the weeds explained. 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.

He answered, The one who sowed this good seed is the son of man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil.

The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The son of man will send out his angels, and they will weed out his kingdom, everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks, Ruth, for reading.

[2 : 3 3] I'm Martin Ayres. I'm the senior minister here at St. Silas. If you didn't already, it would really help me if you could open up your Bibles just in front of you, and turn to that page.

It's page 979, Matthew chapter 13, as we look at that together. We're looking in our tri-church services once a month at these series of stories that Jesus tells, parables.

Parables are these stories with a deeper meaning, and as he teaches them, they seem to have this sifting effect, because you have to stay with Jesus to hear the meaning, and then he reveals what's really going on.

So wherever you are in your thinking about God at the moment, let's just bow our heads and I'll pray and ask for God's help as we turn to this. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the opportunity that you have given us to put things aside, the busy things of life, perhaps the things we're thinking about that we face this week, to put those to one side and really engage with who you are.

And we pray, Heavenly Father, that where we find your word challenging and confronting and provocative, you would so be at work in our hearts that we would be people who respond rightly, who do search after truth, who don't harden our hearts from things we don't want to hear, but who respond rightly.

[3 : 57] Help us to engage with you, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, this story, this particular one Jesus tells about his kingdom, I think it helps us with one of the strongest objections that people might feel to the claims of Jesus today.

And that is, if Jesus' claims are true and the God he reveals to us is there, why is the world in such a terrible mess?

Why wouldn't a good God, who is also a powerful God, have stopped certain things happening? And we might even think of things that have gone on just in the news in recent weeks.

You know, the plane going down in Iran, the trouble in the Middle East, the conflict in Yemen, maybe things going on in our own city, and the brokenness and some of the nastiness and cruelty that we hear about.

If God is good and powerful, if Jesus is who he claimed to be, why are things in such a mess? Why wouldn't God do more about that? Now, if we'd been around two or three thousand years ago, between two and three thousand years ago, and we were God followers, trusting the promises of the Bible, then we'd have had at least one answer to that question.

[5 : 14] It would have been, there's lots I don't know, but I do know the Messiah is coming. The Messiah was a figure promised by prophets over hundreds of years, over generations, by messengers from God, that God was going to send into the world a righteous, rescuing king, and that he would put things right.

And people were pinning their hopes on this promise. And the message of Jesus' followers, when we open up the New Testament, we encounter these accounts of Jesus' life, these followers of Jesus.

Their message is that this man, Jesus of Nazareth, was that Messiah, that the claims, the promises of the prophets had finally been fulfilled in the coming of this man.

And Jesus announces his arrival into the world as that Messiah, as God's promised, righteous, rescuing king. And he demonstrates that he is that Messiah.

So in Matthew, if you're willing just to turn back a bit to chapter 7, on page 972, chapters 5 to 7 of Matthew's Gospel have got maybe the most famous speech in the history of humanity.

[6 : 25] It's called the Sermon on the Mount from Jesus. I remember I've got a book on my shelf of humanity's greatest speeches of the world. And the guy, who's not a Christian as far as I know, has this whole section of Matthew's Gospel in.

And he says, still today, the cornerstone of Western morality is the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus of Nazareth. Now, how did he do it? Well, at the end of chapter 7, on page 972, verse 29, verse 28, at the bottom of that column there, it says, when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching because he taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law.

He demonstrates this authority from God. He doesn't teach like anyone else has ever taught before. And then, in the next chapters, chapters 8, 9, and 10 of Matthew's Gospel, he records for us as an eyewitness, Jesus, demonstrating his authority, not just in his words, but in his works.

And he shows by his works the kind of kingdom that he has come to bring. As around him, brokenness is mended and a blind man can see and a lame man can walk and even a dead girl is raised from the dead.

It's extraordinary. And so, there's this wonderful, wow, the Messiah has come. But if it's really true, and we look back on that now and think, as the disciples would have been thinking then, if it's really true, why hasn't everything been resolved yet?

[7 : 55] Why is the world going on as though the Messiah didn't come? As though, you know, there's still, when you look around at the world, there are bad people, apparently bad people, who seem to prosper, and people who don't seem to deserve it, getting a bad deal in life.

Why hasn't Jesus made everything better if he really is the king? And that's what makes this parable so vital for us to look at tonight. And it starts by Jesus effectively saying, the world is like a farmer's field.

That's his picture. In verse 24, Jesus told them another parable. So we're back in chapter 13 now, verse 24. Jesus told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.

He does it through his servants, and then when Jesus explains the parable in verse 38, he says, the field is the world. And the seeds are people in the world.

So there's good news already here as Jesus starts the story that he's saying, the world that we're looking at today, God does have a plan for the world. It's like he's the farmer and it's the field. He's not given up on it, and in fact, he knows what he's doing with the world.

[9 : 08] But for this farmer in Jesus' story, there is bad news coming. Verse 25, but while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.

It's like an act of bioterrorism. Can you believe it? When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. Now, as I understand it, as a non-farmer, some of you will know more about this than me, what Jesus is describing here is a weed called darnel.

Have I pronounced it right? Any farmers, give me a nod. I'm going to run with it. Darnel. Sometimes it's translated tares. And the thing about darnel is when it shoots up, it's indiscernible from wheat.

It looks like wheat as it's growing, but when the heads or the ears grow, they're smaller. And that's when you get to realize it's not real wheat, it's darnel.

And the other problem is darnel is bad for you. I think it might be poisonous, actually. So for a farmer to find in their field as it grows that there's a mix of wheat and darnel is a bit of a disaster.

[10 : 14] And you can't just go around and pull out the darnel. I mean, I've got a vegetable patch at home, right? And even I know that with the weed. Once things start growing, if you just pull out the weed, the roots are intertwined with the good things you're trying to grow.

So the only way to deal with it is you have to wait for the whole crop in the field to be ready to be harvested. You cut it all down and then you separate out the good ears of the wheat from the darnel that's produced these smaller, poisonous ears.

So the servant asks, that's what happens in the dialogue. The servants, in Jesus' story, they say to the owner, do you want us to go and pull them up? We found the weeds. Do you want us to pull them up? And verse 29, no, he answered, because while you're pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them.

And here is such a key verse for tonight. It's a key verse. Verse 30, let both grow together until the harvest.

Let both grow together until the harvest. And then he looks ahead to the harvest. At that time, and not before, I will tell the harvesters, first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned.

[11 : 24] Then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn. So there are two destinations after the harvest and only two. And the shocking realities come as Jesus explains what he means by this parable in verse 38 over the page.

Excuse me. The field is the world and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. That is the people who have recognized the king. To be in the kingdom, you have to acknowledge the king.

And the king is Jesus. He's shown that he's the king by his words and his works. The field is the world and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one and the enemy who sows them is the devil.

The harvest is the end of the age and the harvesters are angels. In other words, we're living now in the growing season in God's field that is the world and there is a harvest coming.

It will be the day when Jesus returns and he brings an end to this age. It's what we might call the day of reckoning, judgment day. And the proof that that day is coming is that God raised Jesus from the dead.

[12 : 35] We understand that from the rest of the New Testament that Jesus' first followers, I mean, in Acts 17 it's actually said like this that God has set a day when he's going to judge the world with justice and he's proved that by raising Jesus from the dead so that we can look back in history and see a man who was dead, who was alive again and we know that man is the man that God has chosen as his king to judge the world one day.

And when Jesus explains his parable, he then focuses on what it's going to be like at that harvest day. So I've got three points that are actually on the sheets inside if you find that helpful and then we're going to have a little, I'm going to make the three points, we'll have a little discussion and any questions.

So, the three points are the harvest is necessary, the harvest is delayed and thirdly, the harvest is surely coming. First of all, the harvest is necessary.

If God is going to put this world right, folks, he has to have this harvest day. He's not going to go on forever with evil in our world, is he? And the truth is, that is just what we want to hear.

It is wonderful news for us because we long for justice in our world. We cry out for it. If you think about Harry Dunn, he's been in the news I think nearly every week for the last six months.

[13 : 52] He's in the news again last week. Harry Dunn in England riding his motorbike one night outside a US army base and a lady from the army base, the wife of a diplomat, came out in her SUV and she drove for several hundred meters on the wrong side of the road and she crashed into Harry Dunn's motorbike and he died and his family want justice and she pleaded diplomatic immunity and fled and she's in America and they can't get her back.

Now, that day, that can't have been the worst thing that happened in the United Kingdom that day. There were far worse crimes happened. It was dangerous, negligent driving. She made a mistake but why is it in the news all the time?

It's because people are angry that someone has evaded justice. We long for justice for that family, for the Dunn family. They can't rest till things are resolved and someone recognizes that it was wrong.

It's the essence of gangster films, isn't it? We were talking last week, a few of us, about a film and Robbie who watches a lot of films more than me who I work with and I listen on jealously all the films he's watched but he said to me, he'd watched the film and he said, I decided I don't really like gangster films and I thought, I do like gangster films.

What is wrong with me that I like gangster films? Is it just that I like evil? No. The reason why we find gangster films compelling is usually because, unless you do just like evil, is usually because in a gangster film for it to work, there is an injustice that gets unresolved at the beginning so that you want the gangsters to get involved.

[15 : 26] You want the vigilante to win. It's like the movie The Equalizer, if you've seen that with Denzel Washington basically going on a death rampage. Why did people like it?

Why did people even want him to win? Because it was all about injustice that the police weren't resolving so the vigilante steps forward. Or the Godfather, the Godfather trilogy, the very opening scene of the Godfather, a man, Bonacera, goes to see Corleone, the gangster, and he describes what's happened to his daughter.

She's been very badly beaten up by a gang. And it's an awful story. It's the opening scene and he says to Don Corleone, he says, I went to the police like a good American.

These two boys were brought to trial. A judge sentenced them to three years in prison and suspended their sentence. Suspended sentence. They went free that very day.

I stood in the courtroom like a fool and those two awful men, they smiled at me. Then I said to my wife, for justice, we must go to Don Corleone.

[16 : 35] There's the film. We want justice for these people. That's awful. How did that go? Unpunished. And we long for that. We long for it in Zimbabwe, in North Korea, in the Middle East.

And when we come to the person of Jesus, for him to tell us that God is good, surely he has to tell us there will be a harvest day. Let's acknowledge that.

He wouldn't be a good God if this wasn't coming. And wonderfully, it is coming. But it will be dreadful for anyone who has not settled their accounts with Jesus the King.

So in verse 42, he says this, of the people that he's described as weeds, they, the angels, will throw them into the blazing furnace where there'll be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Now he's picking up there, I think, with the burning imagery of the allegory of the burning weeds. But it, nonetheless, I mean, it is a terrible picture, isn't it? It's a sobering picture.

[17 : 35] The weeping and gnashing is a picture of bitterness at the end. And Jesus is the most loving man who's ever lived. As you read the Gospels, love just pours out of him.

So I take it this is the most loving warning we could receive. The harvest is coming and it is necessary. Secondly, the harvest is delayed.

That crucial verse in verse 30, Jesus says, let both grow together until the harvest. So there's the objection we thought about at the beginning.

If Jesus really is the Son of God, why hasn't he put the world right? Here's the answer. It's because he's patient. The Apostle Peter says it like this, 2 Peter 3, he says, he starts by saying, during the days between Jesus' resurrection and his return, scoffers will come, carrying on living in their own way, ignoring God, and saying to those who are waiting for Jesus' return, where is this coming he promised?

Everything's just carrying on as it always has. And he says this, but do not forget this one thing, dear friends, with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day.

[18 : 51] The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come, like a thief. He's patient. That's why there is evil and suffering in our world, because God is patient.

And once the harvest comes in, all the wheat comes in, and that's it. So personally, I'm so glad that Jesus didn't bring in the harvest before October 2000, because if he had, I wouldn't have got into his kingdom, because that was when I turned to Jesus and asked him to forgive me.

So today is a special day, isn't it? It's a special day. I don't know whether you saw this. The date is the second day of the second month, 2020, 0202, 2020.

It's in the news today. It's a special day. It's a palindrome today. But that's not why it's a special day. It's a special day because it's a day of God's patience. Another day for us to acknowledge Jesus as king and ask him to forgive us and become part of his kingdom.

[20 : 10] So how might we get that wrong? Well, if you're a believer here, the application of the parable is don't be disheartened when you look at the world and you see weeds, when you see Jesus rejected, when you see Jesus rejected in people's behavior, in what people say about Jesus.

Don't be disheartened. Jesus told us this is what it will be like until the harvest. Just keep going. Keep sharing Jesus with others. Keep sowing. But if you're here as a guest tonight, it's not don't be disheartened.

It's don't be deceived. Don't be deceived by the world going on as it seems always to have done. Don't treat God's patience with scorn. Don't misinterpret it as evidence that Christianity doesn't hold true when in fact the world today looks exactly how Jesus says here it's going to look until he comes back.

And rather than thinking that evil in the world is evidence that he won't return, he prompts us to think what kind of crop do I want to be?

What kind of crop am I becoming in my life? because what he says here couldn't really be any more provocative could it? But the good news is you get to decide.

[21 : 33] You have a choice. You can choose to be wheat or a weed. But let's not be deceived into thinking that that choice will go on forever. The parable urges us to act today because that's our last point.

The harvest will surely come. Verse 40 As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire so it will be at the end of the age.

We've heard the deeply uncomfortable words Jesus says about the weeds, the destination for the weeds. Look at verse 43. It's incredible, isn't it? Verse 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father.

One boxing day my wife Kathy and I woke up in the morning to her phone ringing and it was her friend Becky telling her that very distressed telling her that her husband had died in the night.

Wasn't even 30 years old. Nobody had seen it coming. It was a horrible thing. But verse 43 He'll be there shining like the sun in the kingdom of his father.

[22 : 50] It's a wonderful promise of the future for anyone who turns to Jesus. So how do we get to be weeds? There's only one question that matters and it's have you acknowledged that Jesus is God's king?

The weeds are only weeds because they're in a field that belongs to a farmer. And so it is with the world today. Jesus has demonstrated that he's king in history and wonderfully he is a king who invites us to come to him and no matter how we've treated him before today the day you come to him he saves you.

He recognizes you as a subject because he came into the world to die on the cross for you so that you can come back to him. He welcomes us and when we do that he sends his spirit into our lives to help us grow and bear fruit and he talks about the fruit that he's looking for and that he'll grow in us fruit of joy and love and peace and he promises us that when the harvest comes we'll be welcomed by him into a world he puts right where we will shine like the sun and he finishes the parable whoever has ears let them hear.

A few years ago a friend of mine got tickets for himself and a few friends not me but himself and a few friends to a concert at the Royal Albert Hall and it said on the tickets no late admissions and he met his friends in a bar and he had by they got together he had all the tickets and it was one of these things where they're in the bar and someone says should we get one have we got time for one more round and someone says hang on a minute shouldn't we get going and he looked and he said it'll be alright have one more drink so they have another drink and they got in cabs and they got to the steps of the Royal Albert Hall and they're just a few minutes late and they got up the steps and got to the front and a steward said I'm sorry sir the performance has started you can't come in and he said oh no no hang on a minute hang on hang on I've got these friends here sorry about that sorry we're a few minutes late but I got the tickets my fault can we just we'll just sneak in I'm sorry sir the performance has started now you can't come in oh come on we'll be really quiet we'll just creep in the back we'll just

I'm sorry sir you can't come in there comes a point when it's too late and Jesus' parable here says when it comes to him and his kingdom today is the day of opportunity but it won't last forever why is there so much evil in the world today if God is good it's because God has decreed let both grow together until the harvest but it is coming because it's necessary it's delayed but it will surely come Amen Let's go offbeaten on your behalf of the herb Let it be one and the of the herb so let's have that for let so let's have for the herb