

Matthew 13:24-45

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[0 : 00] I think the question that I can ask more than anything other, any other question that troubles both people who would describe themselves as Christians and people who would not describe themselves as Christians.

! Really is this problem of evil and this problem of suffering and trouble in the world. So questions like, why did God allow this to happen to me?

And why did God allow this to happen to that person? I was at Express of Cabance at the Sunday of the hour on Thursday nights with Presbytery Men and this front man when he found out we were ministers he said, well why is God allowing all the stabbings to happen?

Why doesn't God do something? Why doesn't God do something about the situation that's in your life? Why does God allow what's happening to you to continue?

And does God not care? And is God just not interested? Does God have the resources and the strength to do what needs to be done?

[1 : 12] Does God not have the wisdom to understand what seems to be really simple solutions? How does it all tie in?

How does it tie in with the concept of a God who is universally loved? And it's an issue which the Lord Jesus spoke about again and again. And from many different angles.

But I've come to see that this week I don't think he addresses it in any other place with such clarity and more poignantly than from Matthew chapter 13. The story is next of a man who goes out into a good field.

He sows good seed and then during the middle of the night an enemy comes and sows weeds, lettuce, thorns. And his field has kind of been invaded.

It's been polluted. And his servants suddenly see this when the crops begin to pop on the ground. And it's endangered his purposes.

[2 : 18] Along with the parable of the sower, this is probably the most well known. It's one of the most significant. And it's one of the most important parables. It's full of divine, really great divine truths.

It's only the second parable of the sower that's explained by the Lord Jesus. And there's a really detailed explanation there in verse 36. The disciples come to him and they ask him, what do you want about with the parable of the sower?

And he tells them. And I want to give you four lessons and the small note from it. I want to say first of all, what Jesus is highlighting is Jesus concentrating our attention this morning on the ultimate origin of evil.

That's my first point, the ultimate origin of evil. Look at verse 27 and 28. The servants of the master of the house came in and they said to him, Master, did you not sow good seeds in your fields?

Do you see that? In other words, the servants, they recognize that the master is good and what he's done is exclusively good. You have sown what is good, so why then doesn't have weeds?

[3 : 27] They're asking the basic question, where has the opposition, everything that you have done, come from? How is it that there's weeds in your fields?

Where do they come from? And Jesus puts it into the master's lips, doesn't he? He says, an enemy has done this. And so Jesus has absolutely no hesitation in identifying the origin of evil.

Now let me say to you, this is not a complete and total picture of all that the Bible says to us. About the origin of evil. But Jesus is saying to you and I, that there is a sinister, personal, supernatural power.

He calls him the devil and Satan. He identifies him in verse 39. The weeds that are sown, the one who sown them, the enemy who sown them, is the devil.

That's verse 39. And both in the parable of the sower, significantly, and in the parable of the tares and the wheat, the devil appears as the one who in both church and in the world is constantly and feverishly opposing all that God is doing in the church and the world.

[4 : 46] The devil is engaged in trying to snatch away the good seed of the word. The devil comes, says Jesus, and snatches the good seed away.

He is kind of engaged in sowing thorns and thistles and weeds. He is opposing that seed which God has sown.

I want to say to you that that is absolutely vital in all our thinking. But if you dismiss this dimension of the devil, of evil, from your thinking, if you refuse to recognize and believe that there is a personal, supernatural, spiritual power of Satan, who as well is solely motivated by hatred towards God, will that be a disaster for you.

I think that's one of the reasons why we find it so difficult to think and to speak as a preacher about the devil. Now as we think, it's difficult to think of a God who is motivated only by righteousness and holiness.

We find it difficult to think about personal devil who is motivated only by opposition to everything that God is and God does. But I say to you that if you dismiss, if you refuse this dimension from your thinking about the devil, then you'll not only be able to understand the Bible, you'll not only be able to understand yourself, and you will certainly not be able to understand the world or the culture that we live in.

[6 : 28] Let me read you words by Ronnie Wallace. Ronnie Wallace wrote this, The disciples of Jesus are not the only people who have seeds to sow or a gospel to tell.

There is an Antichrist, something with Antichrist. And he has seed to sow and a plan to execute, that seeks to displace the true Lord and Creator from his throne.

Jesus, in his explanation of the parable of the tares from wheat, declares quite bluntly that the enemy is the devil. And no one can deny that to Jesus the enemy was a most sinister and concrete personal reality.

Jesus did not speak of himself as one who was fighting against fate. He did not describe himself as one who was fighting against human beings.

He did not come to fight against bad social conditions. Jesus did not come to fight wrong ideas, but as the one who came to fight against a single person.

[7 : 36] A single personal will which has defied God in a sphere far greater than this earth. To Jesus, the power of evil was directed by one evil personality.

One great mind. Having at his disposal a host of agents and emissaries of evil, all moving as part of a strategy to thwart the purpose of God.

Headquarters of this power, this evil, is beyond this earth. That this earth is the battleground on which he throws out his challenge to God.

And so in many ways, the Apostle Paul, he summarised it, the teaching of Jesus and the life of Jesus, when he said to the Ephesians, we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this world.

Against spiritual wickedness in high places. That is the ultimate root and origin and seat of every such phenomenon. And Jesus is referring to that when he speaks of the weeds of this world.

[8 : 52] In other words, more simply, this world that you live in is not the world as God made it. It is this world that has been spoiled.

And it is absolutely vital for you to recognise that. Because we are intertwined in the whole fabric of a world in which sin and all its crop of disease and death and tragedy and cruelty and violence and sickness and stabbings and natural disasters so occur.

And that means that if you are willing to think of it in this way, you will look at the world in a very different way. And you will read the news on the internet in a different way.

Because you will see what is the ultimate explanation. The ultimate explanation in the words of Jesus is, an enemy has done this.

When you see death in the midst of life and you discover the anguish and the agony that death brings.

[10 : 09] That is what brought Jesus indignation as he came to Lazarus' tomb. It was an enemy that had done this. And that's right as well.

I'm often asked to take funerals and people are often saying we want this funeral to be a type of celebration of the person's life. And I know what they mean.

We want to give thanks, don't we? And yet in every single funeral there must be an element of an enemy has done this. It is not right.

What's the real explanation of terrorism? What's the explanation of a senseless destruction? Of stabbings that seem to be utterly and totally random and meaningless.

It is. An enemy has done this. When we see families destroyed by adultery or one partner walking away, what is the ultimate answer?

[11:10] That an enemy has done this. When we read of victims of abuse and broken hearts and families and the nameless heartache that is all around our society and is in this room, an enemy has done this.

Amen. Well, my friend Johnny Gibson and Jackie they had a daughter, Leila, you remember, she was stillborn.

And it's the most remarkable funeral I've ever been in. I've never felt sadder. I've never believed the gospel more. Johnny got up to give a tribute to his stillborn daughter.

It was a remarkable thing. The most memorable thing of that day was he pointed at the coffin and he said, an enemy has done this. That's right, isn't it? And in the church we have to face exactly the same thing.

Do you see, the devil does not stand outside the church on a Sunday morning. The evil one does not stand outside the gates passively. But when you begin to see something eroding, someone's dedication or love or devotion to the Lord Jesus, we might say they're cooling off in their Christian war.

[12:32] Or when you see division coming into church life and little things becoming really big things. and when you see someone intent on damaging the church by grumbling and groaning and throwing your own accusations, Jesus Christ tells you the origin and he says, an enemy has done this.

So the next question is this, what will this be done about? Where does it come from? Well, the answer to that was the first point, the ultimate origin of evil and the second question is, well, what's going to be done about it?

And perhaps it's the most perplexing thing of all this next year, it's the apparent indifference of God. The apparent indifference of God. In some ways, that's the crux of the passage, that's the really sticking point.

The servants say to their masters, look at verse 26, and they say, when the plants come up and bear grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, Master, did you not sell good seed to your feet?

How then is it? Weeds, and then an enemy has done this. So the servants say then, well, do you want us to go and gather them up? But he said to them, no, less than gathering the weeds, he root up the wheat along with them.

[13:52] Now let both grow together into the harvest and the harvest will tell the weeds, gather the weeds first and buy them bundles to be burned. And what they say to him, they come to the farmer and they say, this is what we would do.

And the servants of the household, and they said, Pharaoh, didn't you sow good seed into your field and nectar as weeds? if I was you, let's go and gather them up right now.

Let's go into the weeds right now. And he goes on to say, doesn't he, in verse 30, let them both grow together until the harvest. So let's say, it's the beginning of the summer time, the plants are beginning to grow, the wheat is beginning to grow, but also the weeds are beginning to grow.

And you walk past that field and you look at the field and in the field are loads of weeds and loads of wheat. What do you think about the farmer? You think, he can't be bothered, can he?

He's not taking very good care of his field. You think, that farmer, look, it's indifferent. He's indifferent. He's letting these weeds grow. He's careless.

[15:03] What is he doing? It's such a serious problem, isn't it? The weeds growing in this field. It obviously doesn't matter to him that he's got this field. And many people say that about God.

There's a parent difference. Maybe you're saying that this morning. Maybe you say, what is God doing about this situation? And like these servants, we may go to God and we might say to him, well, if I was you, God, and this is what I would do.

If I were God. And there's an account of the blitz in London where there's suddenly the tragic ashes of a bomb site.

Hundreds of people have been killed. The bombs are still falling. And one man says to the person next to him, I can only be God for ten minutes. If I could only be God for ten minutes.

And his neighbour said to him, if you were to be God for ten minutes, I wouldn't want to live in your universe for ten seconds. But you know what the first man meant, don't you?

[16:17] You know that. He thought he knew what he would do about it. And that God apparently didn't know what he was doing about it.

But you see, the simple fact is not that God's care is inferior to ours, but his wisdom is superior to ours.

Have you got that? Have you grasped that? It's not that God's care is inferior to ours, it's that his wisdom is superior to ours.

for us. For us, the heavens are higher than the earth, shall I buy ways higher than your ways, says the Lord. And the vital issue in facing life and the world and thinking about issues of this kind is that God's ways and God's wisdom and God's thoughts are not like ours, are they?

That means to be my third question. And that is the dangerous fallibility of human judgment.

[17:28] The dangerous fallibility of human judgment, which isn't actually a question. So we don't know the whole story. The ultimate origin of the first thing, the apparent indifference of God is the second thing.

And they say to him, Master, do you not want us to lift the weeds? And he says, no, let them grow together. But the third thing is this dangerous fallibility of human judgment.

Because in verse 29, look what he says, no, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the weeds along with them. Let them grow together until the harvest.

And the harvest have all. I'll tell the reapers, gather the weeds first, find them, but they'll see burnt.

But gather the weeds into my garden. Now do you notice what the owner of the field is saying?

He is saying to them he has a plan for the whole of his field. And the owner of the field will not allow the enemy who would come into the field to dictate the timetable or afford his purpose.

[18:35] The enemy will not wait. The master here is saying that the time for now and the word for now is wait.

That's the word. That's the word the farmer says. The farmer says wait because human interference at this point would be directly against the general purpose of God and the world.

For the farmer to go out and to dig up the field to separate the wheat and the weeds at this point would be against the purpose of God.

And the people who were working for the farmer they might have said we don't understand we don't understand this we don't get this why? But the master said of course you don't understand you just need to accept my counsel.

You live by my wisdom and you wait. They were saying judgment now. That was their word. Their word was now. God's word was wait.

[19:43] Is that what people say? Why doesn't God judge now? Why doesn't God act now? Why doesn't he do something about it now?

But actually if I'm honest I don't think I want judgment now. Do you? And the reason God is saying wait is because God is a God of infinite patience and infinite grace and he is not careless and he is not complacent and he has a greater and bigger purpose than what the servants grasped and he says wait because this day is a day of grace and it's a day of God's kindness but there is a day of judgment to come.

The amazing truth of God's delay is precisely that. It's about how 2 Peter 3 says he says you must understand he says know this there will come people that will mock and they'll scoff in the last days and they'll just do what they want they'll live for their own sinful desires and they will say where is the promise of his coming?

Why hasn't Jesus come back yet? For ever since the fathers have seen all things are continuing as they were from creation nothing's changed it just goes on and on and on so let's just live for ourselves in other words they say God is not interfering with his world but then Peter says but do not overlook this fact because with the Lord one day is a thousand years and a thousand years is one day but the Lord is not slow the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise and some count slowness but he's patient towards him not wishing!

and he should perish but the Lord should reach repentance one day the Lord will come but in the meantime until that time he has a purpose to preserve his wheat the older commentators as you read them on this passage the Puritans and others they say what Jesus is saying here is don't touch the wheat don't endanger the wheat my heart is set upon cultivating the wheat Jesus saying I'm building my church the gates of hell will not prevail against it don't touch my wheat and the point of that wheat growing is that it's going to confront the world it will confront the world and the weeds with all that God is going to do in the world with the holiness of God and God's great concern is with the growth and the prosperity of his courts and he will not let the devil win he will not let the devil dictate the timetable or the pattern of his works you see these servants they thought the master will suddenly go to the field and he'll get frightened by what he sees and he'll be alarmed and he'll scurry about and he'll change his plan and he'll say we've all got to get out there and get the weeds up but he says wait

[22 : 58] God is not panicked God is not surprised his purposes will ripen fast but there is a danger in men and women interfering that person was really right to us the second man of the place that if you were God for ten minutes I wouldn't want to be in your universe for ten seconds here's the last thing the inevitability of divine judgment the dangerous dangerous fallibility of human judgment we don't know the whole story but the inevitability of divine judgment and it's paralleled isn't there these inevitability and perfection look at verse 30 let both grow together until the harvest and at harvest time will tell the weepers separate gather the weeds first bind them into bundles to be burned gather the weeds into my bath and then look at verse 40 just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire so it will be at the end of the age the son of man will send his angels they'll gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin all lawbreakers throw them into the fiery furnace in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth then the righteous will shine out the sun in the kingdom of the father he who has ears to hear let him hear what Jesus is saying is there are times when the world looks like it's in the hands of the evil but the very reverse is the case it is God's world and it is God who is determining his purpose and it is God who is clearly guiding his timetable to the day that he is determined not the devil but on the day when he comes again on the day he is determined at that moment there will be infallible and inevitable judgment

God will make his arm bare of course the godless forces and the evil men and women they are unaware of it they think it's all in their hands but Jesus is saying there will come a time when my word will change do you remember what his word is his word is wait but there is a time coming when his word will be reap and gather out my kingdom you see here's the answer why is God not doing something about this or that or the other well God is not coming yet he's not yet coming in judgment upon a sin sick world to sort the evil from the good but a day is coming when he will do that and he's given to you a day of grace let me summarise and then I conclude number one we live in a fallen world a world where there is sin and disease and death and tragedy of a thousand different forms and it is all part of the evidence that this is not the world as God made it it is his world that has been spoiled and the promise of

God is no more death no more sorrow no more tears no more sin and that relates to the new heavens the new earth and it's at the end of that age of the age that we enter into that glory not now and we need to come face to face with these issues when so many people say why why has this happened why am I going through this why is so much of it frustrating it's because we live in a world's spoiled boy sin and we have the evidence all around us and being a Christian doesn't insulate you that's position that's the first lesson the second lesson is every move made by God in the world and especially in the church will be resisted it will be resisted by the opposition and the cunning of Satan constantly and we need to expect that and not be surprised by it I'm not saying why has this happened it is part of the course opposition is normal and thirdly we need to be very cautious lest we kind of employ a human wisdom a worldly thinking where we think well we can combat

Satan by this and the key note for the time that we live in is patience and prayer and a life of holiness and weight here's the last thing we need to live with an absolute assurance of the triumph of God that's the ultimate note of power Jesus says to you and I do not imagine that life is going to go on like this forever don't imagine that God has lifted his hand off the wheel or that it's out of control no he says the day is coming and the moment is in the mind of God and it will be dictated by the hand of God and when he says now and when he will say to a world that has gone madly towards hell enough that's what Jesus means doesn't he when he says I'll build my church and the

gates of hell will not prevail and God is saying

I have exalted my son to a place of unique glory and one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father and one day that day is coming and we have to fix our eyes on that day and know that in heaven or earth or hell no one or nothing will ultimately thwart God's purpose and it's only a matter of time it is only a matter of time until God will display his triumph and the parable speaks personally to you and I doesn't it that it will only be a matter of time until God will exercise his judgment upon every area of evil and offence let's not imagine that he is careless about it but listen to his voice in the light of that day that's the wind not the judgment of the Lord but one day that will come that's fine