

# Matthew 13:24-35

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[ 0 : 00 ] And again, it's boiling, isn't it? So if you feel you need to get out accidents, there are tyrants, there are bullies which force their plans on the world and crush anyone who stands in their way.

Maybe there are things that have happened in your life and the question is, why does God allow that? And it's a stumbling block, isn't it, to many people. It's a challenge to us as Christians that we need to face that if Jesus is God's King, bringing in God's kingdom, why isn't it here yet? It's been such a long time coming. Why is there so much opposition to Christianity in the world? And in trying to make sense of the world in which we live, I think we can go to two extremes.

We might be over-optimistic as Christians and we might, things are bound to get better and we try to capture the world for Jesus. Things will just get better and better.

The other hand is, we can be pessimistic, can't we? That things are going from bad to worse and so we just battle down the hatches and we wait until Jesus comes back. There's a teaching out there that is a heresy.

[ 1 : 32 ] It comes from America, as most heresies do. It's a teaching called the rapture. You might have heard it. There's many books that have been written on this theme.

There are very bad films that have been written. It's very bad theology and it's this, that when Jesus returns, he will snatch up all the Christians and he'll rapture them away and he'll leave the world to unbelievers.

So you wake up one morning and you go out and there's people's clothes lying on the pavement because all the Christians have disappeared. You were flying to America and there was a Christian pilot and sadly he's just disappeared.

They've been taken away and unbelievers are now in charge of the world and that is a scary thought but let me tell you, it's not going to happen and it's not going to happen because Jesus says it is not going to happen.

And that's what this parable is about. Jesus is not going to root out all the evildoers or snatch away all the Christians. Do you see what he says? They will continue side by side right to the very end.

[ 2 : 40 ] The wheat of God and the weeds of Satan. The sons of the kingdom, the sons of the evil one. Side by side right to the day of judgment. Good and evil will coexist.

And as much as you and I would love God to remove all evil from the world, mercifully, he will not do that until judgment day. And so is this world going to get better or is this world going to get worse and the answer is yes.

The world is getting better. The good seed of the gospel is growing. We've seen that in the first parable, it's an unstoppable harvest. It's producing an abundant harvest.

Grain on the stalk. It's much, much more, isn't it, than that tiny little seed that was planted into the ground. And it's growing. But the weeds are growing.

And every week that passes, they are larger and more deeply rooted than before. And that is the teaching of Jesus in this parable. I've just got two things to say.

[ 3 : 48 ] One, this parable helps us to understand our present reality and it points to a future certainty. Our present reality and our future certainty.

Let's first of all look at the present reality. It helps us to make sense of the world in which we live. When we look at the world, we see, don't we, good and evil side by side vying with each other.

And when you look at world history, you'll see that there are times when evil gets pushed down and that it rises again in a different form. Often in a more sinister form.

And so, 2,000 years of Christianity, the world is much as it always has been. There are still wars out there and there are still rumors of wars. The wheat and the weed, they grow together.

And when I move from looking at the world to looking into my own heart, what do I find? What's my experience? Well, it's exactly the same experience as the Apostle Paul. The good that I want to do, I can't do.

[ 4 : 52 ] And the evil that I don't want to do, I find myself doing. There's good and evil side by side in the world, but there's good and evil side by side in my heart. And that's the present reality in the church.

We're told, Jesus told, we're told that Jesus chose the 12 in John 6, but one of them was a devil. And so, if you're looking for a perfect church, if you've come here tonight as a perfect church, looking for a perfect church, let me tell you, this isn't it.

But if you find it, as someone says, don't join it because you'll spoil it. And let me say, what I'm telling you, it's not an excuse to walk away from the church either.

Some people say to me, they say to you, I don't go to church because it's full of hypocrites. And the response to that is, well, there's always room for one more. Come and join us. The wheat and the weeds grow together.

And that fits with our experience in the world, in our lives, and in the church. The sons of the kingdom are cheek by jowl with the sons of the evil one. Isn't that right? And so just look in the parable with me.

[ 6 : 01 ] There's two things that you wouldn't necessarily know. The wheat and the weed at certain points are indistinguishable. There's a very specific word that's used here to describe the weed.

The bearded darnel. It sounds like something from Lord of the Rings, doesn't it, or Star Wars. But it's a weed. That's the word here.

It's being called wheat's evil twin because you can't distinguish it immediately from the wheat. It's a poisonous, extremely toxic weed.

In fact, in a big enough dose, this weed will kill you. And at first, when it begins to grow, you can't tell the difference between the wheat. Both grow together.

It's why it's so dangerous. And in this parable, this weed doesn't just spring up. Can you see verse 25? It's planted by an enemy. While his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.

[ 7 : 09 ] What have you got here? This is germ warfare. This is bioterrorism. Agricultural sabotage. The farmer's got a competitor. There's a rival who deliberately sets out to destroy the crop.

And he does so by planting poisonous, toxic weeds in amongst the wheat. And doesn't that accord with our experience? According to Jesus, verse 38, the field is the world.

Don't make the mistake that some have made in thinking this parable is about the church. It's not. In the world, there are two agendas. There are two peoples. There are two kingdoms.

There are two forces side by side. Vying with each other. And that's always been the case, isn't it? If you go back to Genesis chapter 3 that Johnny preached so helpfully on last week, there have always been these two. The sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one.

[ 8 : 08 ] And in that first announcement of the gospel, which Johnny preached brilliantly on the other Sunday morning, Jesus preaches to Satan. That's who the first sermon is addressed to. And it's not good news. He says, I will put hostility, I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring.

And he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. And that's the story of the human race. The sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one. And this struggle begins to play itself out. And so Genesis chapter 4, the next chapter, you have a murderer and a victim. And it's played out all the way to the current time. There is an enemy who is opposed to God's rule on earth and he is intent on sabotaging it.

There is a personal, malevolent being at work in this world called Satan and he sows weed amongst the wheat. Verse 25, an enemy came and sowed weeds amongst the wheat and went away.

So when the plants came up and bore grain then the weeds appeared. How does that happen? I read this week that King Jong-un, the Korean dictator, his great-grandfather was a Presbyterian minister.

[ 9 : 29 ] I'm not, he's certainly influenced by Presbyterians but it seems that he may well have been a Presbyterian minister. They came out of China as a Christian family and moved to Korea.

How did that happen? How did he become what he has become? An enemy has done this. While they were sleeping an enemy came and planted weeds amongst the wheat so that now North Korea is one of the most oppressive regimes in all the world.

And yet in North Korea tonight there are sons of the kingdom in that field. and there are seeds of the evil one in that field. Together in God's province. You see we must wake up to this. This is spiritual warfare.

Paul says we wrestle not against flesh and blood but powers and principalities in the heavenly realms. This is the evil one trying to stop God's work in the world seeking to destroy it. Remember Jesus told them in Mark's Gospel it gets that point in Mark 8 where he says and we're going to go up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man which is the way he describes himself will be betrayed to the chief priests the teachers of the law they'll condemn him to death they'll turn him over to the Gentiles he'll be flogged and mocked and crucified.

And they didn't want to hear that. And they say no way Jose is that going to happen to you. And what did Jesus say to Peter when Peter said that?

[10:52] What did Jesus say? Did he say thanks Peter for caring for me so much? Thanks Peter I really appreciate your concern. No he said get behind me Satan.

What he's saying is Peter don't you realise what is going on? Wake up to the spiritual warfare that the enemy is trying to stop me from going to the cross. But I must go.

Satan is trying to divert me from going to the cross and Satan does his damnedness to get rid of him right from the very beginning. So you remember Herod seeking to put those babies to death. And so wonderfully with the bruised heel of his crucified humanity Jesus has stamped on Satan's head and destroyed the works of the devil.

Do you see what is happening is spiritual warfare. You see in Acts 2 when Peter preaches the sons of the kingdom spring up and there's a great harvest. Thousands of people become Christians. And what happens is that the enemy comes persecuting the church from the outside and counterfeiting Christians on the inside.

[12:08] And you remember Ananias and Sapphira pretending to be what they were not. Pretending to be sons of God when they weren't. What is that?

What's going on at that point? It is the enemy planting weeds amongst the wheat. So much harm is done, isn't it? So much harm is done. And it's been done in your life and my life by people pretending to be Christians.

Gandhi was in South Africa during the days of apartheid. And Gandhi was very attracted to the gospel. Gandhi read about the Sermon on the Mount.

He read the life and the teachings of Jesus and was attracted to Jesus. He tried one day to go, well I think, into a reformed church in South Africa and they refused him entry because of the colour of his skin.

And it turned him off Christianity permanently. He said, I would become a Christian if I could find one. How did that happen? An enemy did it. While the church was sleeping, an enemy planted weeds against the weed.

[13:19] The other thing to notice is not only the weed and wheat are indistinguishable at first but they're entwined. Can you see that? So you can't pull up the weed without uprooting the wheat.

This is what he says in verse 28. An enemy has done this. So the servant said to him, well then what do you want us to do to go and gather them? But he said, no, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.

Let them grow together until the harvest and at harvest time I will tell the reapers gather the weeds first, bind them in bundles to be burned. I hope when you read those verses you're glad.

I think we should be glad. Aren't you glad that Jesus said that? Because what if all the weeds were ripped out? Where would that leave you? John Chapman, Australian evangelist said this.

He said, if you're going to call the garbage man make sure you climb out of the bin. It's good, isn't it? If you're going to call the garbage man climb out of the bin, if you really want God to intervene, if you really want God to rip out all the weeds and root out all evil, where does that leave you?

[14:35] What a mercy it is, isn't it, that God has not separated the wheat from the weeds. He lets both grow together until harvest. That is the kindness and the patience, the perfect patience of God towards us.

God says he doesn't wish that any would perish. Peter says, the Lord isn't slow to carry out his promise, as some count slowness, but he is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but all come to repentance.

He doesn't want anyone lost. Those who are weeds today may be wheat tomorrow.

That's what Augustine said. And that was Augustine's story. If you know anything about him, Augustine certainly knew how to sow wild oats, and he was a young man who lived a very wild, desolate life.

But St. Augustine had a godly mum, Monica, who prayed for him. And he was wonderfully converted in 386 AD. Converted to Christ in 386 AD.

[15:42] But what if Jesus had come back in 385 AD? What would have become of him then? What about you?

How many of you have become Christians in the last 20 or 30 years, or the last 10 years, or the last year, or the last few months, or the last few minutes? What if Jesus had come back before then? I think that I became a Christian in July 1993. I'm a bit unsure. It's a complicated story. But I think it was July 1993.

Not everyone can give a date, neither do you have to give a date. But what if Jesus had come back in May 1993? Or June 1993?

I would have been eternally lost, because I was weed amongst the wheat back then. I came to church three times a Sunday, but I didn't love the Lord Jesus Christ. And you must not assume that you're a Christian tonight just because you're sitting in church.

[16:50] Because the wheat and the weeds, they grow together. The sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one can be sitting side by side in the same row in church, but don't despair because God is kind and God is patient.

And he's slow to anger and he's swift to show mercy. And those who are weeds today may be wheat tomorrow. So let both grow together. Now let me apply this.

What he's saying is where the wheat and the weeds grow together, your roots as a believer will be intertwined with people whose roots will be very different from you.

And that will be true in your life. God has placed you, it's not a mistake the family you were born into, it's not a mistake the situation that you find yourself in.

God has placed you in his sovereign providence into the family you've been born into. He has put you into the career that you're following. He has placed you where you are in his sovereignty with people and your roots are intertwined with people.

[17:56] And what Jesus is saying is this, don't pull up the roots. Let both grow together until the harvest. In other words, he is telling you and I, engage where you are with who God has planted you with.

He has put you in your daily life. And so don't rush off to some monastery or whatever the equivalent of that is, don't kind of rush into some holy huddle singing praise songs.

God in his sovereignty has put you into your family and so stay there, engage with those people. You are probably the only Christian in your workplace, in your school, and stay there where God has placed you.

And your roots are intertwined with those people and not how God has designed it to be. Don't pull up the roots, flourish where God has placed you. Remember those who are weeds today, maybe weak tomorrow, and remember this, that the mission of the church is sowing seed, not pulling weeds.

Do you hear that? We've got a big enough challenge, haven't we? I've got a big enough challenge trying to deal with the sin in my own heart, in my own family. It's not in our power, it is not in our calling to root out in the world.

[19:21] Root it out in the world. That is the calling of Christ, he will do it in the great judgment. You know what Paul says to the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians chapter 4, what have I to do with judging outsiders?

That's not my business. It's those inside the church that we are to judge. God judges those outside, so stop judging those outside. There's a lot of that about, isn't there?

Don't pull up the weeds, sow the seed. I think it's an issue, isn't it, for churches like us, that we can become really issues driven.

We have a voice, we're entitled to make that Christian voice heard, to proclaim Christ publicly, to stand up for those who are most vulnerable.

We're entitled to make our voice heard to the government, to make our views known. There is a place for that. But I find it far easier to sign a petition than a petition on the throne of grace.

[ 20 : 36 ] And our calling is not to pull up weeds, leave that to Jesus on judgment day. our job, our calling is to plant and sow the seed amongst people who we've been placed with.

So this is the present reality, sowing and growing, but thank God there's no mowing. Sowing and growing, but no mowing. The kingdom is coming, and it is coming, and the seeds of the sons of the kingdom are springing up through the preaching of the gospel.

The kingdom is coming, and judgment is delaying. That brings me to my second point, which is the future certainty, for judgment is certainly coming. And that's why Jesus takes us in his explanation of the parable in verses 36 to 43, to the end of the world of the day of judgment, and he sets himself up as the final arbiter of human destiny.

And make no mistake, this day is coming, and it is only a heartbeat away. C.S. Lewis describes it in one of his broadcast talks. He says this, I wonder whether people who ask God to interfere openly and directly in our world quite realise what it will be like when he does.

When that happens, it is the end of the world. When the author walks onto the stage, the play is over, and God is going to invade, all right? He will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature, and it will be too late then to choose your side.

[ 22 : 05 ] That will not be the time for choosing. It will be the time when we discover which side we've really chosen, whether we realised it before or not. Now today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side.

You see, there's an urgency about this, isn't there? There's a future division of the human race, and Jesus is the one who is going to judge. You will not be judging Jesus on that day.

people people often say stupid things to me. They say, I've got a bone to pick with your God. I've got some questions I'd like to ask him.

Do you think that you're going to be judging Jesus? No one is going to be judging Jesus on that day. The Son of Man, that favourite self-designation, verses 41 to 43.

The Son of Man will send his angels, they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and lawbreakers and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[ 23 : 10 ] And then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father. He who has ears, let him hear. It's pretty graphic, isn't it? Jesus doesn't mince his words. It is terrifying.

This is gentle Jesus, meek and mild. The wheat and the weed will be eternally separated, the harvest will come, the wheat will be gathered into God's barn, and the weeds will be burnt up. I know it's picture language, I'm prepared to concede that. It's picture language, but the reality is more sobering than the picture. And there is a massive warning, isn't there, for you and I here, that hell is a reality.

And no one had more to say about hell than the Lord Jesus. No one spoke more frequently about hell than Jesus. And listen to what he says, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

That is, hell is a place of eternal, everlasting regret, but no repentance. Eyes opened, but hearts not softened.

[ 24 : 17 ] Reaping and gnashing of teeth, permanent and unrelenting. Anger and frustration against God, that is hell.

And Jesus doesn't say this tonight to frighten you. He says it because it is true. Jesus doesn't say it to frighten you.

He's not trying to scare people into the kingdom, that is not how Jesus operates it. He doesn't say it to frighten you, he says it to warn you. And he's looking for a response for us.

Verse 43, he who has ears, let him hear. Heed the warning. You've got a pair of ears, haven't you? Some of you are blessed with your ears. Some of us have considerable ears. There's no mystery about becoming a Christian.

[ 25 : 20 ] You don't have to go to a secret ceremony. You don't have to come to a special place. You have to listen. You have to listen to what Jesus is saying to you tonight.

If you've got ears to hear, there is a way to escape hell tonight, and to be bundled together with those who are Christ's people. And so take this tonight from Jesus as a challenge, not a conclusion.

Take it as an invitation to life, not a sentence of death. Two of the great leaders of the 19th century, the Christian leaders, were John Newton.

He wrote Amazing Grace. He's a converted slave trader. You can go to his church at Bank, right in the heart of the city. He was a converted slave trader, and one of his friends was William Wilberforce, a man who spearheaded in many ways the end of slavery.

He was a social reformer, and Wilberforce and Newton were great friends. Wilberforce moved in high circles. He was a friend of the Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger, and he invited William Pitt the Younger to go and hear John Newton preach.

[ 26 : 33 ] William Pitt the Younger became Prime Minister at 24. He was a brilliant man, one of the most famous Prime Ministers. William Wilberforce invited him to church, and Pitt said, after he'd been there, my dear Wilberforce, what was he so excited about today?

I don't think I grasped it. Pitt was one of the most brilliant minds in England, listening to one of the most eloquent preachers of grace, the man who wrote Amazing Grace, and yet he heard it, but he didn't hear it.

He didn't have ears to hear. And I think tonight he's regretting that, don't you? I think he will regret that to all eternity.

He heard the gospel, but he didn't hear it. Hearing it, but didn't understand it. And what about you? Do you see yourself in this parable?

What are the parables? Earthly stories of the heavenly meaning, it's not a great diagnosis, it's not a great definition. A better definition that somebody has said, they are like hand grenades, they're like time bombs, that Jesus throws and then they go off and they explode at the right time, and Jesus throws these stories alongside us, which is the word literally what a parable means to be alongside us.

[ 27 : 59 ] And he gives you this parable not to destroy you, but to save you. And so do you see yourself in the story, a simple story? Can you see yourself here? Are you a member of the royal family, a son of the king, or are you a son of the evil one, a member of the devil's family?

Which family do you belong to? At harvest time, Jesus says, I will tell the reapers, gather the wheat first, gather the wheat first.

Gather the wheat first together, and throw the weeds into the fire. They'll be bundled up together.

Which bundle are you in?

On that great and terrifying day, will you be found in the bundle of life, bundled together with those from Christ's eyes? Will you be among the righteous who will shine like the sun? Do you know where you'll be in that day?

And if you're unsure tonight, please make sure tonight. Jesus is saying to you tonight through the preaching of his word, turn to me, cry to me, trust me to save you and I will rescue you.

[ 29 : 21 ] I will rescue you from the wrath to come. John Wesley was the founder of Methodism. He famously said, the world is my parish.

He averaged 15 sermons a week. I can just about manage one decent one. He reached right up into his 80s. He preached 40,000 sermons. He travelled more than 250,000 miles on horseback even into his 80s.

During an age when the roads were just muddy tracks, no tarmac, he was an incredibly organised guy. He meticulously kept a diary and this is his entry for the 28th of May 1742.

We came to Newcastle, Newcastle-pontine, about six o'clock and after a short refreshment walked into the town. I was surprised. So much drunkenness, cursing and swearing, even from the mouths of little children.

Do I never remember to have seen and heard before? It's a small compass of time. Surely this place is ripe. Ripe for what?

[ 30 : 24 ] What would you say? How would you finish that sentence? Our natural reaction would be to complete the sentence well with something like this. It's ripe for hell.

Surely this place is ripe for judgment but Wesley saw things differently and this is what he wrote. surely this place is ripe for him who came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

That's it, isn't it? This is what this parable teaches us. As you look at the world around us, how do you see it? Do you see it being ripe for judgment?

Finger wagging, pulling up the weeds, pharisaical Christians, ripe for judgment, almost gloating over it. All right for Jesus. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, when you saw the crowds and the multitudes, you had compassion on them. You wept over Jerusalem. You pleaded with them to repent.

[ 31 : 32 ] You came not to condemn but to save. Scripture even tells us that judgment is your strange work. And so Heavenly Father, we ask that you would give to us the heart of the Lord Jesus for this city, for this area, for this family.

We ask Heavenly Father that you would be gracious to us tonight. You would melt our icy hearts. You would soften the stony heart here.

and you would give to us the heart of flesh by your Spirit. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.