

Extravagant Hope
Matt 13:24-30, 36-43

Call: Ps 46:1-7, 10-11

Scripture: Rom 8:18-24a

I. Intro

Good Morning! My name is Shawn Reese. I am one of the pastors here at PBCC. I don't know about you but I have trouble reading the news these days because I don't want to see the latest headlines. Rampant evil seems to capture the headlines on a daily basis, whether it be shootings or wars or simply people being nasty to other people in all sorts of ways. And, it causes me to raise some questions. Maybe it does for you too? Why is there so much evil in the world, especially if God is good? Or, if Jesus brought the Kingdom of God with him, as he proclaims in the parables, why is there still evil around? In other words, why the delay in the elimination of evil? Or, is there any hope in the midst of this rampant evil? These questions swirl in my mind almost daily, but would also have undoubtedly swirled in the minds of the hearers of Jesus' preaching in the 1st century. And, so, Jesus tells the parable of the wheat and the weeds.

We come now to our fourth week in our summer series in Jesus' parables, what we are calling Overflowing Extravagance. And Jesus is making us think. He uses the parables to share the nature of the Kingdom of God and the God the Kingdom. But, in doing so, he arrests us and makes us think. And, in the arresting and thinking, he unsettles us, which compels us to action. In the end, we must decide whether to trust what he says about the kingdom of God and the God of the Kingdom and build our life on it or we decide to reject him and his words about the Kingdom of God and the God of the Kingdom and build our life on something else. Either way, we are compelled to act.

This morning we come to the parable of the wheat and weeds or what has also been called the parable of the two sowings. It is a parable unique to Matthew's Gospel. I invite you into our text this morning, beginning in Matthew 13:24.

II. The Parable (24-30)

24 He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, 25 but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. 26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. 27 And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' 28 He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' 29 But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

A. The Usual

Well, as we have seen in all the parables, Jesus begins in a usual place. A man goes out to sow good seed in his field. Note the “his.” We will return to that later. The man sows good seed. Of course, he is going to sow good seed. This is what a farmer does. He wants wheat so he sows grains of wheat. A very ordinary, usual beginning to a story.

B. The Unexpected

But, then the unexpected happens. While the workers are sleeping, his enemy comes in and sows weeds among the wheat. Note the “his.” The enemy is “his” enemy. The weed here is sometimes translated tares. It is a mimic weed called darnel. Darnel is a particularly insidious weed, common in the Middle East, which is a poisonous fungus. If eaten, it will cause dizziness and nausea, and possibly even death.

This takes us by surprise. It is certainly an unexpected twist for us.

We, in the 21st century typically dismiss this parable for two reasons. First of all, a lost crop does not frighten us in our culture. Food, for the first time in history, is overflowingly abundant in our society, and we never go hungry. That was not the case in the first century. A lost crop at that time would be devastating. Secondly, we dismiss it because we don’t think it is realistic. We don’t think that an enemy would sabotage a field like in this parable. However, the people of the first century would have easily tracked with this parable. The story *does* come out of the usual, everyday life in the first century. In fact, an enemy sowing weeds in a field was so normal, the Romans had a law against it. But even today, William Barclay notes that this story is not an improbable story in some parts of the world (or at least in the mid-20th century when he lived). Today in India, *one of the direst threats which a man can make to his enemy is, “I will sow bad seed in your field”* (Barclay, 39).

So, there is usual-ness here, even though it feels unexpected for us. But, we do get another unexpected twist after the wheat and darnel grow; verse 26, *after the fruit appears, the workers notice the weeds*. There must have been an abnormal amount of weeds to have blamed it on sabotage. But, in their conversation the master unexpectedly says, “Do not weed.”

C. The Unsettled

I don’t know about you, but weeding is a constant activity in gardening, farming, even for my lawn. It’s what you do. But, here, the master says, “Do not pull up the weeds; instead, wait until the harvest.” And, we are left unsettled. Why would the master say this?

There are two agricultural facts at work in this parable. First of all, one cannot tell the difference between wheat and darnel as they grow. It is impossible to distinguish one from the other while they are growing. It is not until they both have headed that the differences are obvious. Secondly, as both plants grow, the roots of the plants become intertwined. And, apparently, the roots of the darnel are actually stronger and go deeper than the roots of the

wheat. This means that you cannot pull up the darnel without also pulling up the wheat. Therefore, the master must wait until the harvest in order to separate the wheat from the darnel. The master has no other choice. Removing the darnel too soon will destroy the entire crop.

Now for this parable, like the parable of the sower, the disciples do not understand. So Jesus thankfully gives his interpretation, albeit it comes after two other shorter parables in chapter 13. The interpretation begins in verse 36.

III. The Interpretation (36-43)

36 Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." 37 He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. 40 Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, 42 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

A. The Details

As we saw last week, the disciples again do not understand. So, Jesus explains the parable to them. In his interpretation, he gives seven key features to the parable. He doesn't interpret every detail, but he does interpret seven details:

1. The sower: Jesus as the Son of Man
2. His field: The world.

B. The World

The word there is cosmos which means the entire created order. What we find in this parable is that Jesus owns the world! Verse 24 we find that the farmer is sowing in 'his field.' In verse 39, we see that this field is the world. Jesus owns the world! He is Lord of all and one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess it. Jesus thinks of his kingdom ministry as simply reclaiming what is his. Jesus enemy is a thief and he has no right to be in this field, this world, doing what he's doing. So followers of Jesus can say to him that he has no authority here. Hands off. This is Jesus' territory.

3. The good seed: Those who belong to the kingdom.
4. The weeds: Those who belong to the evil one.
5. The enemy: the devil, the evil one.

C. The Enemy

Jesus has an enemy (25). He is the devil. This enemy hates Jesus and does evil. He is bent on destroying him and everything in Jesus' kingdom. Followers of Jesus must understand this truth in order to make sense of all of reality, including the daily headlines of the news. Followers of Jesus must understand this truth in order to understand discipleship in the kingdom. Jesus acknowledges the evil one's existence. Jesus lives his entire life in obedience to the Father and aware he has an enemy.

This means of course that the world is not a neutral place. No environment is neutral. All environments are promoting something and deprioritizing something else. Environments are always nudging us in some direction. Andy Crouch talks a lot about this in his fantastic little book, *Techwise Family*. Environments always nudge us somewhere. "They don't make us do anything but they make certain other choices easier and more likely" (Crouch, 33). Something to think about this week.

Now, by the time Jesus teaches this parable he has bound his enemy. Jesus bound the enemy in the wilderness. That's his great victory. And, once he binds the enemy, he can begin plundering the strong man's house (Matthew 12:29), casting out evil spirits. Yet, although the enemy has been bound, he is still active. He is still a "roaring lion, seeking people to devour" (1 Pet 6:8).

How about the work of the evil one? Well, as the dandelion stealthily intertwines with the wheat, so does the evil one. He stealthily works in places that are initially unrecognizable. And, he is doing everything possible to sabotage Jesus' kingdom, stealthily, right within his kingdom. He is right on Jesus' heels, sowing his bad seed.

This is why when there is a spiritual revival, it is also accompanied by crazy distortions. It's why when we go on mission trips and have spiritual highs, they are usually followed by major crashes. The enemy is sowing right on the heels of the kingdom. But, we don't have to panic! It will always be this way.

Notice as well that he is very tricky! He works by imitation. The dandelion and wheat look the same until the fruit shows. Followers of Jesus always have to be watchful of this. The evil one is always imitating Jesus. This is what happened in the garden. In the garden, the evil one quoted God, but not exactly. He twisted the words ever so slightly. His methods were exposed there and continue to this day.

This is why followers of Jesus must always be in Scripture. Followers of Jesus must soak in the Word continually. If we are not in the Word, we will be vulnerable to his imitations.

6. The harvest: the end of the age.
7. The harvesters: angels. Both images are common images for judgment in scripture and Jewish tradition.

D. The Final Judgment

What is striking is that Jesus spends most of his words in the interpretation on the harvest (39b-43), on the final day of judgment. At the end of the age, the separation happens. The weeds are those who “cause sin and are law-breakers,” verse 41. These are people who cause others to stumble and who live against Jesus’ teachings. These are the “loveless and lawless” ones, sons and daughters of the evil one (Bruner, 44). And, they will be gathered and thrown into hell. Jesus uses apocalyptic language here to speak of hell. Jesus doesn’t want anyone to go there, which is why he warns of it so frequently in the Gospels.

But, judgment will come. There is judgment, and it will come. God is not lax with evil. He sees it and will judge it.

But, it has to wait until the end. Why? Because judgment must be just. Judgment only comes at the very end after evil has shown it will not repent. But, it has to be given the time to show it’s fruit, that it is truly evil with no hope for conversion. God’s grace is so extravagant, and his justice is so just, he waits and waits and waits and waits. Then, at the harvest, there can be no question about the rightness of the justice. God waits and so must we.

And, what we see in this parable is that pre-mature judging of evil will harm the wheat. Should we gather up the darnel? No. Why? Because we may uproot the good wheat that is growing alongside it. If pre-mature judging happens, the wheat is harmed. Saul of Tarsus might be an example. If he was judged too early, all of us would be adversely affected. Perhaps another example might be when followers of Christ are so eager to judge evil that they take a very strong, negative stance against the world, and ‘not yet believers’ or young believers get turned off. We adversely affect the wheat.

This came up recently with in a conversation with me 10th grade niece, a really sweet young lady. And, we were talking about her going on a mission trip this summer. And, in the middle of the conversation she said, “So, smarty-pants uncle pastor, why do we only hear what Christians are against and usually in a judgmental tone? Why don’t we ever talk about what we are for in loving tones?” She has a point.

Pre-mature judging harms the wheat. So, what are we to do?

We resign from the judging business. We are not to play Santa Claus, making naughty and nice lists. We don't judge, as Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount. But, what does it mean to not judge? It means to not condemn someone, or give up hope for someone or close the book on someone. To judge is to write the last sentence of a person’s life. And, none of us have the right to write the last sentence on any person. We do not have all the facts and to do so is to play God. Judgment must wait until the end so it will be just. Only God can judge.

However, followers of Jesus are to be in the discernment business and naming evil business and the rejecting evil business and the helping others reject evil business. And, I think followers of

Jesus can be in the warning of judgment business and calling for repentance business. But, the warning and calling must follow Jesus' model of preaching, which emerges from a heart for sinners, a heart for everyone, a heart that takes him to the cross for sinners. It is a heart overflowing with love and compassion. We must lead with love and compassion.

Because – the other unsettling truth from this parable – followers of Jesus are not *ultimately* harmed by the sons and daughters of the evil one growing next to them. Pre-mature judging of the darnel is harmful to the wheat, but the darnel and wheat growing next to each other is not ultimately harmful; verse 30, *Let both grow together until the harvest*. Jesus, the master farmer, is not worried about his seeds growing alongside the seeds of the evil one, which is why he can wait. The greater harm is not the evil seeds, but the premature judgment of the evil seeds. The bottom line is that followers of Jesus do not need to develop a fortress mentality. They do not need to withdraw from the world. They do not need to go down the “Benedict Option,” if you know the recent bestselling book which encourages Christians to withdraw from the world, like St. Benedict in the 6th century. Jesus prays for his followers in John 17 that they would be in the world, but not of it (17:15). In fact, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus expects his Beatitude people to impact their world as salt and light. Because his great promise of John 10:28 is that, *“no one will snatch them out of my hand.”*

So, what are some other implications from this arresting and thought-provoking parable?

IV. Implications

1. **We go about living for Jesus. We seek his kingdom above all else.** We hang in there with him, and trust he is who he says he is and trust him when he says that two sowings are going on. We do not need to fear the world or seclude ourselves, but what we need to do is seek first his kingdom in our ordinary lives. The kingdom, the will of God, is the most important thing in life, more important than my job, my vacation, all the other things that consume our time and attention. So we must seek it above anything else (Blomberg, 126). It doesn't mean the job is not important, or the vacation isn't important, it's just that they are all a means to an end, furthering His kingdom. Is it my kingdom come or his kingdom come? We need to treat life in the kingdom as the treasure in the field and when the man found it, he sold all he had and bought that field. We seek his kingdom and his righteousness with the help of the Spirit, thereby producing fruit of the kingdom. As this parable teaches, the difference between kingdom people and not-yet kingdom people is in the fruit, the fruit of righteousness, or what I like to call, right-relationships. The “righteous” are the ones who will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father, which brings me to the next implication.
2. **Secondly, we live with extravagant hope.** Notice the language of family in this parable? In the Father's kingdom, we are called sons and daughters of the king. We are adopted into a family where the living God is our father. This is our identity! My worth is found in that identity, not in my abilities or my performance. I am a child of God! “Joining the [kingdom] is not becoming a number in an army, but joining God in a relationship of intimate sonship or daughtership” (Wenham, 59). And because of this relationship, the

destiny of the righteous is to shine like the sun with our good father. This description matches Matthew's description of the transfiguration in chapter 17. We will share in the glory of God for all of eternity. This is our extravagant hope, a hope that is bright, certain and unshakable. And, we are always prepared to give a reason for this extravagant hope (1 Pet 3:15). Which leads to my last implication this morning.

- 3. Thirdly, judgment is real so we resign from the judging business but we are to work in the witness business.** We are gathered every Sunday in order to be sent every Monday to share your hope. This is your ministry. Tomorrow morning when you wake up, you are heading to your ministry. Some missionaries are full-time cross-cultural missionaries. If you are not that, then you are a full-time same-culture missionary. God has sown you specifically where you are to be his witness, to share your extravagant hope. You are sown among the world in order to extend the incarnation to the world, in order to be his heart of love and compassion, in order to show his extravagant hope. Everyone wants to know why you have hope, because there isn't much hope around. So, how do we show our hope? A primary way of demonstrating our hope is in our relationships with others, after all the kingdom is all about relationships. As Dallas Willard has said, "The true social activist is the person who lives as an apprentice of Jesus in his or her ordinary relationships" (Smith, 55). This is how we share the extravagant hope we have.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, I'd like to close with a Dietrich Bonhoeffer from his famous book, Life Together, "The Christian cannot simply take for granted the privilege of living among other Christians. Jesus Christ lived in the midst of [the world]... And, Jesus came for the express purpose of bringing peace to the [world]. So Christians, too, belong not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the midst of [the world]. And, it is there they find their mission, their work... According to God's will, the Christian church is a scattered people, scattered like a seed to all kingdoms of the earth... God's people must live in distant lands among the unbelievers, but they will be the seed of the Kingdom of God in all the world" (Bonhoeffer, 28).

Benediction

You are the salt of the earth.
You are the light of the world.
By the power of the Holy Spirit,
Do not lose your saltiness and do not hide your light.
Go forth into all regions of the bay area
Seeking first his kingdom and
witnessing to the extravagant hope in our extravagant God
Revealed in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen

Resources:

William Barclay, *Matthew, Volume 2*

Craig Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables*

Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Churchbook*

Andy Crouch, *Tech-wise family*

James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Community*

David Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus*