

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43 Parable of the wheat & the weeds

We live in a world where leaders still gas their own people. Others confine them to slow and agonizing death sentences in gulags. Human-trafficking remains at worldwide pandemic levels, victimizing an estimated 27 million people. ISIS recently marked all Christians in the 2nd largest city in Iraq for mandatory conversion to Islam. If they wouldn't comply, they'd pay for it – in fines, expulsion or death. Effectively, it was an extermination.

Many times we are left asking: “Why is there such heinous evil in the world?”

Quite commonly the related question rises up from hurting hearts: “Why doesn't God simply remove the perpetrators of such evil?”

Our loving Lord understands our pain. He knows our questions. He has answers for us in His Word.

He leads us back in time to a place He wants to show us again and again: that ancient, notorious place called Golgatha ~ because here, only here, can we begin to understand. Here at Golgatha, we see men digging into God the Son with metal spikes, pinning his flesh to rough wood. We see men flinging mocking insults like unseen spears at his spirit. We hear God himself crying out in immeasurable agony.

And the question “Why doesn't God simply remove the perpetrators of evil?” is turned on its head, and another one rises from our hearts: “Why did God allow himself to endure such evil?”

It wasn't just at his death that Jesus was “*a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering*” (Is 53:3). He knew the pain of hunger gnawing at his stomach (Matt.4:2). He knew the pain of fatigue – he slept the sleep of exhaustion amidst a life-threatening storm at sea (Matt.8:23-27). He felt the pain of rejection – there was a time even his own brothers did not believe in him (John 7:5). “*He himself suffered when he was tempted...*” (Heb.2:18).

Why would God want to come into a world filled with so much pain and evil? ... why would he determinedly walk the path of this life, knowing his final destiny: torture and death on a cross (Luke 9:51)?

That's truly a good question! It's the place for us to start today as we look at our questions about the evil and pain in this world. When you see the reason why Jesus was so willing to experience such pain, you have the foundation of the answer. **He has love that is beyond understanding!**

He cares so much for me, that he came to seek and to save me – a lost and condemned individual. He cares so much for you, that he came “not to be served, but to serve you and to give his life as a ransom for you.” The perfect & complete payment for sin has been offered to God. “*Everyone who looks to [God] the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and [the Son] will raise him up at the last day*” (John 6:40).

I might not understand or even be allowed to see the reason why God allows this or that evil to spring up in the world around me. But this I believe with certainty: my God has proven his undying love for this pain-racked world. You can entrust yourself, and your loved ones, to him – he loves you. Trust His perfect love and His good purpose in everything he allows. **He has love that is beyond understanding!**

From this starting point, we can explore the rest of the questions this parable of Jesus answers.

As we begin to do that, let's make clear how this parable is different from last week's. Jesus' lesson in the first part of Matthew ch.13 – the parable of the Sower – showed us how an individual becomes a believer and stays a believer (remaining alive spiritually).

The parable of the wheat and the weeds presents a broader picture: instead of God's work in individual hearts, it shows God's activity in the world at large. Jesus, himself, explains: *“the field is the world.”*

So, what is our life like in this world?

Believers exist side-by-side in this world with the *“sons of the evil one.”* And that means evil people, yes even ruthless people, go on living, often prospering, wreaking havoc in their wake.

But why doesn't the Lord just pull up the “weeds” who blight humanity; uproot the evil one's – the devil's – spawn?

Look at our Lord's explanation. Look at his reason for allowing the weeds to remain: vs.28-29 *“The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull the weeds up?' 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them.’”*

The reason he leaves the weeds? He has love beyond understanding for us, his people. He cares so much about you, about me, that He isn't willing to lose one of us. He won't risk even one of us being uprooted from faith while getting rid of the unbelieving *“sons of the evil one.”* So our Lord waits. That doesn't mean he ignores the issue. The separation of the unbelievers, along with all their evil, will come. But it can wait. It **must** wait. This is the answer to why the evil doers remain.

Through this parable, our Lord also teaches us a healthy pattern when we face challenging questions:

1. Don't let your emotions &/or logic govern you and run you amuck. Things get all mixed up when you, or I, turn away from the view of God on the cross ~ going to all lengths to save us ~ and towards our logic to attempt to answer the “Why?” questions.
2. Dig into the Word to find the Lord's answers. This alone can give true wisdom, comfort, strength, and peace.

This Word of God opens my eyes to see: my God is not to blame for the weeds. In fact, my God shows me with honesty the evil I have contributed to the world. Understand, you and I are not the weeds. Not any longer. Oh the grace! We – by God's grace – are the wheat. And yet, you – I – we still sin daily. And our selfish decisions wreak havoc on bystanders in our lives. What is the answer for your sin & mine, to remove all record of our evil from God's sight and make us right? Our Savior, our Lord Jesus, assures us of His never-failing forgiveness.

Our God deserves our thanks, because He has washed you and me clean in Baptism – through the Word, and robed you & me in His righteousness. He has placed His name upon you & me, and He has kept us in the faith. We are his sons and daughters – princes and princesses of the King of heaven & earth.

So when you face pain, when you hurt – as you will, hear him remind you of His everlasting love for you. The culminating reminder of that comes at the end of Jesus' parable.

When someone undergoes pain or difficulty, when one gets saddened by the sight of all the evil in the world, it's not uncommon to hear: **Is there any end in sight?**

Jesus answers in today's parable: Yes. And Jesus' answer reveals: it will be glorious for us. It will mean complete peace for us.

With your status as prince or princess of the King comes the guarantee: **you are heirs** – you **will** receive the inheritance. Jesus ends his words in the parable with this promise: *“then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear”* (vs.43).

In Romans 8:18, we are told: *“Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”* This parable is certainly a grand, vivid portrayal of that truth.

Look forward to heaven in heaven, not here on earth. In fact, the wickedness of the world and the evil we face at its hands can / does serve God's good purpose: our hearts are led to focus on the Lord's promises. We are led to long all the more for our heavenly home. The daily opposition we feel in the world can serve to strengthen, to deepen our faith, and to draw us into a closer relationship with our Lord.

Talking to God's people in his day, Peter says, *“... now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed”* (1 Peter 1:6-7).

During the time until the harvest, see this also. Part of God's love for this dying world is: he has planted us – his people – in it... that means pain for us, while offering God's hope to a world of people still lost. (He wants to bring more to become his sons and daughters – to be brought to faith. He uses us to share his saving truth.) **He has a love that is beyond understanding!**

Then, at God's good time – the final separation, the removal of *“everything that causes sin and all who do evil.”*

In the time until then... *“We live in a broken world full of hurting hearts and shattered lives”* (WLQ, p.235, vol.108). But we have a Savior ... who is preparing a place for us in heaven. He also brings healing now to the hurting hearts of his people with the assurance... we are embraced by him – his presence to accompany us, his power to protect us, his love to comfort us. He understands what it is like to suffer what no human can fully imagine – to suffer where no human arms can reach to comfort. He endured the cross. He rose from his grave. He lives to accompany us, to protect us, and... to bring us home.

Then, we'll have all the answers. Until then, entrust yourself – and your loved ones – to his care. If we've learned one thing today, we've learned: **He has a love that is beyond understanding!** Amen.

Matthew 13:24-30 & 36-43

Additional discussion – “beyond the sermon”

Pick one of the following. (Do both in your group, if you have time.)

 The pain that God allows helps keep us healthy. Discuss.

- ✚ Suffering gets our attention, maybe when nothing else would, and directs our attention back to the Lord. We are drawn to...

We have the certainty that pain does have a purpose, that it can lead to powerful good, that it's never for nothing.

- ✚ Consider this additional purpose: Pain is "God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world" (CS Lewis). Discuss.

Pick one of the following. (Do both in your group, if you have time.)

We acknowledge: in some – maybe many – instances, we will have to wait for heaven to know the good purpose behind sufferings experienced here on earth.

- ✚ Allow "room" for God to be God. Discuss.
- ✚ Here are some encouragements. Read them, and then see if your group has any passages to add to the list:

[The Lord:] "Be still, and know that I am God" Psalm 46.

[The Christian:] "Be at rest once more, o my soul, for the Lord has been good to you" Psalm 116.

"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope" Psalm 130.