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The Gospel According to Matthew

Weeds and Bad Fish in the Kingdom

February 17, 2019

Sermon Text: Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43; 47-50

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 3

This past week I was reading through the introductory section of G.K. Beale's very detailed commentary on Revelation. After summarizing the letters to the churches, he wrote this:

“...the church in any generation is typically not a healthy, witnessing church. Nevertheless, there is always a small part of the church which faithfully maintains its witness like Smyrna and Philadelphia. This sober assessment of the church's overall

condition matches what is said in 2 Timothy 1:15-

2Ti 1:15 You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.

...Ministers of the gospel must be aware of such realistic evaluations of the church, so that their calling is not destroyed when the triumphalist expectations of modern Christendom are not fulfilled.

Therefore, the focus of the book (ie, Revelation) is exhortation to the church community to witness to Christ in the midst of *a compromising, idolatrous church and world.* [NIGTC: The Book of Revelation, G.K. Beale]

I sent this quote to some of our online church family and one lady responded with some excellent insight (which I will be quoting in an upcoming blog post). Here is what she said:

I think what you've outlined has been one (of many) of the things which God clearly revealed to our little group through what has happened to us in the last few years - much to my dismay. At times it has been an almost crushing weight of truth to realize that people (many people) are not who they portray themselves to be.

You've probably heard of the term *cognitive dissonance* - our mind's attempt to mesh together opposing beliefs or values into something that makes sense for our reality. That term probably sums up for me much of the last 25 years of my life. My husband was not who I thought, members of my family, practically my entire church - none were who I thought them to be - and in ripping away the veil which had shrouded those people, it's as though God ripped away a bigger, wider veil. He has shown by so many examples that *the majority of people who call themselves believers and attend church are fakes*. It's been shocking and incredibly painful.

Yet truly God has been kind at the same time by also bringing a few wonderful, genuine believers to come alongside us, and for us to bear their burdens in return. What He has made more clear to all of us here is that there really is an ultimate and continual conflict between good and evil - there always has been since the Garden. It's everywhere and all around us and yet we (I) didn't see it, not really, not like this, until the evil of my husband and my church was exposed.

But as Beale says in the excerpt you shared, there *is* a remnant. A small part which faithfully maintains its witness, thanks be to God. This is also what we had begun to feel as the dust settled a little and we looked around. There are those who truly and sincerely love God and want to please and obey Him. They're real. We may be scattered, but we're never too far apart, never without hope and encouragement. God never fails to give it. And He has helped me to be sooo much more appreciative and aware of what a blessing it is.

Many thanks to her for these insights and for the encouragement they bring to us here.

All of these things relate directly to two of the parables Jesus told that are also recorded here in Matthew 13. Here they are. The parable of the weeds (or tares) and the parable of the fishnet:

The Parable of the Weeds

Mat 13:24-30 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.'"

The interpretation of the parable:

Mat 13:36-43 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.

The Parable of the Fishnet:

Mat 13:47-50 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. (48) When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. (49) So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous (50) and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Once again we see the principle that Jesus followed. He spoke in parables because His truth is not for all to see. He only reveals His Word to those who really want to know it. These are typically few in number.

Alright then, what do we have in this parable of the weeds? –

- Christ sowing the Seed (the word of the kingdom, the gospel)
- He sows it in a really big field – the world
- He sows only good seed which produces the real thing – sons of the kingdom

- At the same time, the devil is sowing his weeds, his evil children
- At the final judgment, Christ by His angels will separate the good from the evil, sending the weeds into the fire.

This parable is just a bit different from the Parable of the Soils. Here the seed sown by Christ is said to be *the sons of the kingdom*. But in this picture, some of the seed sown is bad seed. Weed seed. It is not sown by Christ, but by the devil. It is the devil's wicked children.

Now notice that Jesus said that the enemy sowed his weeds *among the wheat*. This indicates that these sons of hell are parading and disguised as sons of the kingdom. We see this also here:

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.'"

Now, let's make one conclusion first before we move on to the primary application I want us to look at. We

can conclude from this parable (and the next one) that:

The church is not authorized by Christ (and neither is the civil government) to "purify" the church in some misguided effort to purify the kingdom of God. That is to say, things such as the Inquisition are never warranted by God. This certainly does not mean that Christians are forbidden to make judgments and practice church discipline because other Scriptures plainly authorize and command us to do so. But judgment of a final kind (such as burning at the stake!) is a judgment we have no authority to carry out.

Let's spend the rest of our time this morning though looking at these two points:

1. The devil is in the business of planting his evil seeds among the wheat.
2. These bad seeds can often look very much like the good seed.

First, *the devil does in fact and can be expected to sow evil counterfeits among the real sons of the kingdom*. And we know from other Scriptures that the number of these counterfeits is quite large. The Lord will say to *many* on that Day, "depart from Me, I never knew you." It is not an exaggeration at all to say this:

The number of counterfeit Christians, sons of the devil, has always been larger throughout church history than the true children of God.

Scripture would lead us to that conclusion and history affirms it. Think this through. How many people in the world right now claim to be Christians? Think for instance of the Roman Catholic church throughout the world. Think of the “Christian” cults who claim to be followers of Christ. In fact there have always been entire nations of people who would say that they are a “Christian” nation.

Right now all around us we see evidence affirming this fact as well. Just this past week there has been a widely publicized expose on how the largest evangelical denomination in this country, the Southern Baptists, have for decades actively covered up hundreds of cases of sexual abuse in their churches and worked to hush up victims. How can such a thing happen unless the “pillars” of such a church are sons of the devil, weeds sown by Satan to imitate Christ’s work and bring His name into disrepute?

NOTE: We must be very wise in evaluating such reports. For example, Al Mohler – one of the top chiefs of the SBC and seminary, went on record in the past few days apologizing for

the way he has allied with the wicked and dismissed the victims. But he is apologizing after the fact – in response to the heat being turned up by the Houston newspaper’s in depth investigation and reporting. Are all these people now who are coming forward to “repent and apologize” the good seed of Christ or the bad seed of the devil?

One of our online church family said this:

I suspect if you asked many Christians today they would say that as a result of the current shaking of the visible church regarding sexual abuse etc. - people would say that this is good - the church is waking up, cleaning house, etc.

But I wonder if when all the dust settles from the current visible church 'house cleaning' that we will eventually find that the churches' end state will be worse than the first. Are they really just like the legalist of scripture who cleaned his house of its demon only for the demon to return with more demons...

Because, as we have learned here in our study of Matthew, where repentance is only outward and the heart remains unchanged and the Holy Spirit is not present, such self-reformation only results in a person becoming enslaved to the enemy sevenfold more.

The second point from this parable is *the bad seed can look very much like the good seed – so much so that we may not be able to tell the difference very easily at all.*

Now, let's take a very honest survey of ourselves. It is a simple question:

Do we believe this?

Because most people who claim to be Christians in fact do not believe this even though the Lord so plainly teaches these truths throughout Scripture.

Do you believe that *the devil can always be expected to sow his evil seeds among the real people of God, that there are many of them, and that their ability to imitate the good seed is so remarkable that you will be convinced, at least in the short term, that they are the finest Christians you ever met?*

When a serial killer is caught, or when some man who just murdered his wife and children is caught, what do, in basically every single case, the people who “knew” him say? You know the answer. “We never saw anything in him like this. He was the nicest guy. The finest father.” When Ted Bundy was arrested for kidnapping and attempting to murder still another victim in Utah, what happened? People

who knew him flocked to the courtroom to testify of his fine character.

We have seen this repeatedly over the years here in our church, right? Victims of an evil man or woman testify with facts about how they have been targeted and what always seems to happen? “Oh no, that can't be. Surely you are treating this poor fellow unfairly.” And so he takes them with him.

Here is wisdom. And it can be easily proven from scripture. Our online sister said it and I repeat her words:

He has shown by so many examples that *the majority of people who call themselves believers and attend church are fakes.*

Have you learned this? I hope so.

I remember many years ago teaching a Bible study on Romans 3 and an older man who was there (who was unsaved) raised his hand and said:

“Well, you know

Jeff, I've lived a long time and I just want you to know that there are a lot of fine, good people in this world.”

If that is still your thinking in regard to the visible Christian church, then

please spend some lengthy time this week prayerfully studying our Lord's words here.

So vital is it that we get hold of this that the Lord told a second parable making the very same point:

Mat 13:47-50 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. (48) When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. (49) So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous (50) and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Finally, if you are a real Christian and thus belong to Christ, you can be certain that not a single error will be made on that final Day. Many, many Christians have been "cast out" by wicked ones parading as sons of the kingdom. But in the end it is not the judgment of man that counts, but the judgment of the Lord. Not a single good seed, not a single good fish in that net of humanity will be lost. The Lord knows His own and no one can ever take us from Him.