

Introduction

In order to help me cope better with the Wisconsin cold that is on its way, I decided to have a fireplace insert installed. It was scheduled for this week. But the plans came to a screeching halt when I discovered an invasion of bees. Bumble bees came to nest in the compartment next to my fireplace. I called an exterminator and he came right on out. We found where the bees were entering the house and he treated the area. "So that does it?" I asked the guy. "Yeah," he said, "it will take two or three days." Two or three days? I wanted those rascals done in an instant. But I guess two or three days is better than two or three weeks.

If you are like me, when something irritates you, you want it taken care of immediately. Little has changed in the history of humanity. Ever since the fall, we have all been short on patience. It was no different with people in Jesus' day. The Jews were ready for Messiah to come and to promptly rid them of their troubles, knock off their enemies and see them judged. Their thought was that when Messiah came, he would bring judgment with him at that moment. But this was not God's plan. The main message of the parable of the wheat and the tares is patience. Jesus told it to instruct his disciples that they were going to have to wait for the full extent of the kingdom to come.

[Read Text; Pray]

Last week we studied the parable of the sower. If you recall, that parable communicates that as wonderful and gracious and powerful as the word of God is, not everyone will welcome it. Many will be resistant to it. To those who follow Christ, the resistance to the gracious offer of God is appalling. It deserves judgment, right now! John the Baptist had introduced Jesus as brandishing a winnowing fork to judge between the righteous and the wicked. So it would be reasonable to believe that Jesus' followers would have thought that these who did not welcome the word should receive judgment . . . now! However, Jesus instructs through this parable that the

faithful need to wait until harvest day, which will arrive at some point in the future. That is when judgment will take place.

I. The Enemy Presence in the World.

With the emergence of Jesus, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Jesus has accumulated followers. With the forward movement of the kingdom, proclaimed by Christ himself, why would anyone resist him? And yet it was the case. Many resisted and a growing number outright hated Jesus.

Jesus depicts this reality in the parable in the form of an enemy who sows weeds among the wheat in his field. He identifies the enemy as the devil. The good seed represents the sons of the kingdom. The weeds sown by the devil are the sons of the evil one. They grow together in the world. This is a difficult situation for the wheat. The sons of God are intermingled with the sons of the devil. And it is a hindrance to the wheat. It is a challenge and it is grueling for the righteous to be in the world. In verse 41 Jesus refers to the tares as those who do evil and are stumbling blocks.

Believers in Christ and those who are resistant to him live together, with lives intertwined. It is a challenging situation. The sons of the evil one hate the light that is shined by the sons of the kingdom. They would draw the sons of the kingdom away. There is hostility and resentment toward the kingdom. The world urges believers to join in with its sinful indulgence. The world in some cases mocks Christians and in some cases persecutes them. Just as it treated Jesus with disrespect, so it is with his followers. Such is the presence of evil in the world. Those early disciples experienced the presence and the influence and the scheming of the enemy in their day and so do we.

In part, this parable is an alert to never forget that Christians are surrounded with enemies and we are in a battle. Ungodly counsel abounds. Pressure to conform to the world exerts itself every day. Scoffers taunt the godly as in Psalm 42:3 where the psalmist says, "My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?"

Jesus is giving a dose of reality in this parable. If you would follow Christ, you would be like a plant of wheat struggling to grow in the midst of weeds. To persevere will require endurance. It will require resisting the pull of the world. It will require defying the flesh. It will need to be looking to Jesus constantly. The writer of Hebrews put it this way, "Let us . . . lay aside every weight, and the sin which clings so closely, and let us run WITH ENDURANCE the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him ENDURED the cross despising the shame." Jesus is the one who blazed the trail of endurance through a field of hostility and resistance and he is the one who will see us through. We must be looking to him—trusting him, following him, imitating him, and being encouraged by him. Are you looking to Jesus this morning?

II. The Impulse to Judge the Enemy

The servants in the parable ask the Master if they should go and gather the tares. "Since an enemy has done this, shall we remove the work of the enemy from your field?" They are asking if they should pluck up the tares at the current time. Surely the wheat would grow better, bigger, and stronger if the weeds were taken away. Should they separate the tares out from among the wheat right now?

This question of the servants directs us to a key point of instruction with which the parable is concerned. The lives of the sons of the kingdom are intertwined with the lives of the sons of the evil one. Is now the time for judgment to occur? This is the impulse that is experienced by God's people. If people reject the word of God, shouldn't the judgment fall, and right now? The voices of the servants seem to represent the reasoning of the disciples. James and John exhibited such reasoning when the group was making its way through Samaria. There was a village which would not welcome Jesus. James and John asked Jesus, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" Jesus rebuked them and went on to another village.

"Let's just bring down judgment on these people right now." That is the impulse in the hearts of the righteous. It is grievous to live in this world. It makes the soul heavy to observe the rampant wickedness in the world.

Habakkuk expressed this weariness at the opening of his prophecy. He asks:

O LORD, how long shall I cry for help and you will not hear? Or cry to you, "violence!" and you will not save? Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted."

Over and over psalmists ask the LORD, "How long?"

The cry in Psalm 44:23-26 is this:

Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord?

Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever!

Why do you hide your face?

Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?

For our soul is bowed down to the dust;

our belly clings to the ground.

Rise up; come to our help!

Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!

"God we need you now. Bring justice now!" This is the cry of the hearts of the righteous living in a sinful world. It is the cry of wheat living intertwined with the sons of the devil.

Do you not also tire of the unholiness that is lived out all around? People behave pompously, lewdly, and selfishly. They oppress the weak and kill the innocent. The language of the world is unclean, derogatory, and coarse. And it is not just the actions and the language of the world. Part of the burden of living in the world is the things it teaches. It professes lies. It holds forth faulty views of God or that there is no God. It misrepresents Jesus. The world in which we live calls evil good and good evil. It is hard living in a culture like we do. It is a stumbling stone for God's people. Think what it would be like if the voice and example of the world was not heard or seen. The servants desired to extract the tares from the wheat so that the wheat would grow better and be healthier and stronger. Living for Jesus, it seems, would be easier if we did not live in Sodom and Gomorrah.

So we tend to cry out, "How long O Lord?" We want the easy way out. We do not want to be tested. And we want to see justice.

III. The Need to Wait.

The master responded to the impulse of the servants to pull the weeds now with this direction, "let both grow together until the harvest." The harvest is the end of the age and the reapers are angels.

The voices of the disciples come through the words of the servants: "Do you want us to do something about this now?" The instruction the Lord gives them in response is "no." Not you. Not now. Wait. Wait til the harvest. Let them grow together until then.

They are looking for the extraction of God's enemies from among them, but they are told no. I think of Paul the Apostle praying for the removal of a thorn in the flesh. Likewise, he was told, "no," but he was also told, "my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made known in your weakness." The answer to our longing and impulse for justice now is "not yet," but "my grace is sufficient for you."

There comes through these words a call to the sons of the kingdom, to you and me, to wait. Be patient. Hold on. And wait on the Lord.

1. Wait patiently. Trust in God's good timing. Your circumstances may be challenging. You may be afflicted. The world may harass you, but keep entrusting yourself to the Lord. There are ways you will experience the grace and power of God in the midst of the storm that you would not otherwise. Think of this promise of the Lord to his people from Isaiah:

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."

Waiting patiently means trusting in the Lord and experiencing his sustaining grace in the midst of the struggle. The Lord said to Paul, "My grace is

sufficient,” and so Paul said, “most gladly therefore will I rejoice of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” So we are to wait patiently.

2. But we must also wait expectantly. The day of justice for which the righteous long will come. God is not slow. He is patient and he is methodical. He has a plan. Judgment is coming, and when it comes it will be dramatic.

IV. The Facts About Harvest Day

The waiting will come to an end. It will happen on harvest day. Jesus says that day is the end of the age. A final day which culminates the age in which we live will come about. From that point forward, things will be different. This is the age of enduring and working and anticipating. On that day what we anticipate will come to be. The Son of Man will send forth his angels and they will separate from out of the wheat the sons of the devil. Judgment will ensue. Jesus gives graphic depictions of what will become of the two categories of sons.

A. First there are the sons of the devil. These are the tares sown by the enemy. They are lawbreakers and causes of sin. They will be gathered and bound to be burned. These will then receive divine justice for their sin.

1. God ABHORS sin; and he despises workers of sin. There is no sin without people to commit it. The Bible says (Psalm 5) “You are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers.” Psalm 7:11 says “God is a righteous judge and a God who feels indignation every day. If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow; he has prepared for him his deadly weapons.” God is HOLY, HOLY, HOLY. He cannot abide sin. He particularly hates stumbling blocks and those who cause others to sin. Jesus said it would be better to have a great millstone fastened around one’s neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea than to cause one of his followers to sin. Jesus also said, “Woe to the world for

temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!”

2. Sinners who do not repent are tares. They are lawbreakers and those who cause others to sin. These will be thrown into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is hell. It is where the weapons of God’s arsenal are justly unleashed upon the unrepentant.

Jesus reiterates this solemn warning in the parable of the net. Verses 47-50 recount the parable. [Read]

The eternal conditions to which sinners will be sentenced are difficult to imagine. These are horrific conditions. The figure of a fiery furnace reflects the holiness of God in action against the soul of the sinner. As far as the sinner, the fire is of utmost pain and torture. The holiness against which he has exerted himself in life will exert itself against him in death. And it will be excruciating. Weeping in the fiery furnace reflects the intensity of the pain as well as the grief that it is too late. There is the sense of “what have I done? Why would I not listen?” There is a sense of utter hopelessness because the situation is utterly hopeless. There is also the gnashing or grinding of teeth. When a person feels pain they often will grit their teeth. So this action reflects the aspect of pain. And yet gritting one’s teeth is also what one does when angry and determined. The crowds who heard Stephen preaching Christ gnashed their teeth at him as they hurled rocks and sent him to his death. Those consigned to hell are regretful and remorseful for their punishment, but they are not sorry for their sin. They continue to possess a heart that is hardened against God. And so it will be for them forever and forever.

Everyone needs to ponder what Jesus himself teaches about hell—the fire, the weeping, the gnashing. I shudder at the notion. The world abhors such thoughts as these. I want to flee from such thoughts. But I dare not and you dare not. In these images Jesus gives us a clearer picture of God than we will have if we ignore them. The world would argue that if God should subject human beings to torture such as this he is a monster.

But the testimony of hell is that sinners are the real monsters. What hell's reality declares to us is that God is holy. His holiness is incomprehensible to us. His inward purity and moral excellence are so exalted that he by his own nature and character is compelled to punish sinners to the full extent of justice. There are some things God cannot do. And for one, he cannot overlook sin. It would "un-god" God if he were to fail to punish sinners justly. And the extent to which sin is punished does not speak to us of a malicious God but of a holy God who will protect his holiness and absolute moral excellence. The extent of the punishment of sinners gives an idea of just how exalted the holiness of God is.

No sin will ever go unpunished. Sinners that go unpunished will only escape because their sins are punished through the wrath God poured out on his only son. The gospel is this—that he who knew no sin became sin for us and suffered in our place that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Are you appalled by the graphic picture of torment and sorrow to be experienced by those who will not repent? Do not shut it out of your mind! Let it show you how wicked you are and how worthy you are of that eternal destiny and of how great is the love of God that he would give his only son to make a wretch his treasure. Repent of sin and turn to Christ. Flee for refuge to Jesus today!

B. The situation for the sons of the kingdom is a complete contrast to that of the sons of the devil. "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." This hope is so rich and so amazing. It is as glorious as the dread of hell is repulsive. It needs its own sermon. So I am going to save that for next week.

Conclusion

Does anyone enjoy waiting? The way people around Milwaukee speed through red lights tells me they do not like waiting. I don't like waiting. There is within each of us an impulse to want what we want right now. I started smoking meat this summer and I have learned the necessity of waiting. I discovered that low-and-slow is the secret to delicious ribs and brisket and pork loin. You can't hurry things. If you do, the meat is tough

and chewy. But if you take the time and let the low heat and smoke and time do its work, the results are sublime!

God does not give us all the reasons for working on the time table he does. What he does tells us is enough. The end result of his doing things his way in his time will most redound to his glory and our joy. We just need to trust him in this time of the weeds and wheat growing together and work the fields. You know if you are busy doing something while you wait the time passes a whole lot faster. And the Lord has given us the charge while we wait to work the fields. He is holding back for the sake of those who need to repent. They need to hear the gospel. We need to carry it to them. And before you know it the judgment will fall and God's people will join him in glory.