

Weeds Among Wheat

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[0 : 00] I don't think anybody particularly enjoys waiting.! But the one that brings the worst out in me is waiting on the phone.

! And what I mean by that is when you phone up a big company or organization! and you greet it not by a person but by a machine and they tell you that you will be spoke, you can speak to somebody soon but you get passed from person to person and some music kicks in to entertain you and to keep your day happy and alive and every now and then one of those voices kind of kicks in and says your call is important to us.

Maybe laugh, there was a meme I came across recently where he said your call is important to us, please stay on the line until your call is no longer important to you.

But there is a very serious type of waiting. A deadly serious type of waiting and that's the type of waiting which knows about suffering or injustice.

An agonizing wait perhaps for something that might be a very heartbreaking situation. A very stressful situation.

[1 : 30] Perhaps the type of waiting that knows the reality of opposition over and over again. That's the type of waiting that causes biblical writers to cry out how long, oh Lord.

Those sort of times when we just wait and wait and wait and we just long for God to step in and do something.

If that's you, if that summarizes you in any remote sort of kind of way, be assured and encouraged that this parable that Jesus gives us speaks directly into that experience of waiting.

How so? Well, because when Jesus gives us this parable, he's saying to us that when you experience those things, that experience of waiting, don't be surprised when there's opposition. Don't be surprised by the agony of the wait. Don't be surprised when something stirs within your heart that calls out, when, oh Lord, is this going to change? Don't be surprised when the weeds of opposition and pain wrap around the wheat of the good things in life.

[3 : 02] And whilst that itself does not accelerate the experience of waiting, whilst it doesn't in itself change the reality, the very fact that Jesus taught us specifically that we are to expect to wait, and we expect the reality of the weeds in our lives, it changes the way we see things and we experience them.

And let's just over these few minutes, just dip into this parable and just ask ourselves a little bit more about what it might be saying to us.

Jesus says, imagine a field of good soil and a good seed which presents good wheat is sown. It reminds us that God actually wants life to be blessed. That life itself is good. That the world is good because it is God's creation.

And that God wants you and me to live full, happy lives. But as the story goes on, he says, the enemy comes along and plants the seeds of weeds in among the good seeds.

[4 : 25] And so they grow up. When Jesus gives us this image, he is bringing us back to a very basic but vitally important worldview.

It's this. That when we look at our lives and we see the sense of wanting the good, but yet experiencing the bad, don't be surprised.

Because there is the reality of good and evil in the world. We don't live in a spiritual vacuum. Life has this spiritual dimension and it has good spirit, but there is also opposition.

There is the enemy. There is the devil. There are the powers of darkness. And scripture provides us with this worldview, this lens through which we are to see reality, which presents it as a battle between the principalities and powers.

The forces of good, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of light and all that is good, that God intends for his creation and which ultimately will come to pass. But the forces of opposition that will go to battle with those things.

[5 : 43] That when there is good, we can expect there to be opposition. Because of the enemy. And it's important that we grasp that because it means that when things go wrong, when we face opposition, when we face pain, it's not that there's something wrong with you.

It's not that there's something weird or strange or different or quirky about you. It's not that God doesn't love you. It's not that God doesn't care about you or that he's ignoring you because Jesus says that this is how you are to expect life to be.

And the reality is, is that wherever we see that there is goodness in life, we will find that there are weeds that grow up around that goodness.

Weeds get sown in all sorts of places. Weeds get sown into marriages and families, into neighbourhoods, into schools, into workplaces and organisations and governments.

Every single person on the planet seeks the good in life. We all seek blessings. But as Bishop Sandy Miller once put it, no blessing goes uncontested.

[7 : 13] Whenever you seek blessing in life, expect it to be contested. I can guarantee there is not a single person in this room right now who doesn't want some kind of blessing.

That might be over a health issue. It might be over a relationship issue in family or friends. It might be a work-related issue. It might be seeking peace of mind.

It might be financial freedom, whatever it may be. We all seek blessing. And when we look at life, it probably is a mixture of blessing and battle and opposition.

And so we're brought back to this image of good seed, good wheat, good plants representing that which is good, which God intends for us, but entwined with weeds of opposition that would seem to threaten and thwart the blessing.

No blessing goes uncontested. Indeed, the greater the blessing, the greater the anointing, perhaps expect more and more opposition.

[8 : 25] It's no accident that whenever Christians and groups of Christians, individual Christians and churches and Christian organisations set out to do good things, there will be opposition.

Because it's a fact of this period between Jesus' inauguration of the kingdom and his coming again. And indeed, we can expect that the more we seek out to bless others and to bring blessing into other people's lives, the more we can expect that kind of opposition. No more clearly do we see this illustrated in the life of Jesus himself, who is God's ultimate blessing to us.

You cannot see more blessing than in the life of Jesus when God comes to us in human form. He makes his dwelling among us in human flesh.

And yet he's crucified. No blessing ever goes uncontested. And it's important that we hold fast to that because when we find ourselves in the midst of the waiting, when our prayers are some form of, when, O Lord, when, O Lord, will you change this?

[9 : 51] Lord, will your kingdom come? Will your will be done on earth in heaven? Lord, set us free. When, Lord, will this change? When our prayers resonate with that, don't be surprised that there's opposition because the weeds are reality.

The weeds are a fact of life that Jesus said would be there. Now that may not take the weeds away straight away, but the fact that we know that Jesus told us that that is what we should expect, perhaps, just perhaps, may encourage us.

One of the reasons why I find the Christian gospel and all its claims so compelling is because it doesn't try to pretend that certain realities aren't there. Rather, it engages with them.

Yes, there is suffering. Yes, there is pain. Yes, there are weeds. But that's not the ultimate reality. We'll come to that in a moment.

But first, let's just consider something I think that's quite important here that Jesus says about these weeds. And it's this, that not everyone can tell the difference between the wheat and the weeds.

[11 : 13] Let me say that again. Not everyone, when we look at the whole of the world and human society and culture, not everybody can discern the difference between the wheat and the weeds, between right and wrong, between the powers of good and the powers of darkness.

Commentators are pretty much agreed that when Jesus was talking about the weeds, he wasn't just talking about just a slightly annoying plant. He was talking about a very specific type of weed which contemporary farmers in the day of Jesus would have known all about.

A species called the bearded darnel. Two interesting things about the bearded darnel. Firstly, it was toxic.

Poisonous. If you ate it, you would die. The second thing about the bearded darnel is that in its early stages of growth, it was virtually indistinguishable from wheat.

So you've got this picture of wheat and weeds, but it's not just weeds. It's the threat to destroy the wheat. It's two things that one is good for you and life's sustaining.

[12:37] The other will kill you. And yet, they're virtually indistinguishable to the naked eye, at least in the early stages of growth. We live in a culture that for much of the time, that wider culture, will look at the same realities as those who are followers of Jesus and will be able to discern that which is good from that which is bad.

Perhaps most of the time, our wider culture can do that. But not always. And thus, we should not be surprised if we take this parable seriously.

when we find those times when our own culture, our wider society, cannot differentiate between the things that are good and life-giving and that are sanctioned by God and those things that are the very opposite.

And our task as Christians is one of discernment. You see, it's not always easy because very often, issues can make their way into public life which seems so plausible that we find that certain moral values become normalised because they have become legalised.

And yet, just because something is enshrined in law, it does not mean that it is morally right. Just because a nation may legalise something, it does not mean that that which it legalises is that which God blesses.

[14:34] And yet, the reality is that when things become legalised, so in the public psyche, they become normalised. We accept them. such that with the course of time, certain things that a previous generation would have said more widely, no, this just is not right.

Gradually, they become accepted and normalised, even to the extent that those things can become normalised within church life and culture.

And as we look back over the last 50 years or so, we see this happen again and again and again within our own nation.

I'm thinking of abortion. I'm thinking of wider cultural attitudes to human sexuality and marriage. I'm thinking about euthanasia.

And so the list goes on and on and on. Wesley said, what one generation tolerates, the next will embrace. our calling as Christians in every generation, each and every generation, is to be awake to what God is saying is good and that which is not.

[16:09] and to be bold and brave enough to call it out when it needs to be called out. But this parable is a parable of hope.

And if we may find ourselves, although we may find ourselves in the midst of the waking with a sense of somehow overwhelm maybe at times over what seem to be the forces of opposition and the forces that can seem to thwart what would seem to be God's plan and God's will, if in those times in the waiting we may be tempted to despair, as Jesus tells us this parable, remember, the parable ends with a promise.

The weeds won't always be there. That there will be a harvest when all that thwarts and threatens the goodness of God's creation will be rooted out.

and separated and all will be made new. That's important because the promise that the wait won't be forever, the promise that the kingdom is coming, that hope and that expectation makes all the difference because it means that in the waiting God is to be found.

One last story. There's a story about a boy who was in hospital. The hospital had an educational program. Tutors would come in, they would liaise with local schools and they would help children that were in hospital with their education whilst they were out of school during their stay in hospital.

[17:59] There was one particular boy he'd been very ill indeed. This tutor who had never met him had met with one of his teachers who said could you when you go in spend a good amount of time going through nouns and adverbs because he needs to do it and I'm worried he's going to fall behind.

Well the tutor went in and when she saw this boy in this ward she was shocked. he looked so ill he looked so despairing and she thought how on earth am I going to teach a lesson on nouns and adverbs here in this situation it just doesn't feel appropriate but she had her instructions so she did

and she found it a really distressing experience trying to go through the differences between nouns and adverbs with a boy who just seems so poorly.

She left and as she left she was so dispirited so downhearted she went back about a week later before she went into the ward she saw the nurse and the nurse said to her I don't know what you did last time you came in she got ready to apologise she said but after you left that lad turned a corner she said really she said go and see him now she went in he was like a different different kid and she said you just seem so much better what's happened he said this I had given up all hope until your visit when I realised that they had sent a teacher to me to go through nouns and adverbs I realised that somebody was expecting me to get better focus on the fact that God has a future for you not the weeds not those things that cause you to despair the sense of opposition the sense of discouragement those things that can cause you to give up hope no when you're feeling in the midst of the wait and you're crying how long oh Lord be reminded of the promise that he is coming again and that promise of hope is the promise that there is a future for you and because we know there is that future for us

God can be found in the waiting let's pray Lord thank you for this story of the wheats and the weeds and help us when we find ourselves in the midst of the waiting where blessing seems to be contested and opposed and when we may feel that sense of overwhelm what is represented by the weeds help us to remember that you have a future for us and because you have a future for us we may find life in the present now thank you Lord for the way that this parable urges us to hold fast to the reality that life will not always be as it is now that ultimately there will be a harvest that ultimately your kingdom will come in all fullness and there will be no more suffering

Lord in the midst of our waiting whatever that means and whatever that looks like meet with us in the power of your Holy Spirit in Jesus name Amen