

In waiting

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[0 : 00] He put another parable before them, saying, The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.

So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. 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?

And 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? But he said, No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.

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.

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.

[1 : 08] He answered, The one who sows the good seed is the son of man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the children of his kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil.

The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so it will be at the close of the age.

The son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all lawbreakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace.

In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father. He who has ears, let him hear.

360 million Christians worldwide are currently facing persecution. Those are the latest figures from the UK government.

[2 : 13] That's quite hard to comprehend, isn't it? Comprehend. 360 million people facing opposition, hostility, imprisonment, labour camps, or worse, because of their faith in Jesus.

That is across the world. And I guess in the UK, the Christian faith is increasingly opposed. It's opposed politically. People using British values to silence Christians saying anything unique about the Christian faith.

There's cultural opposition as Christians are mocked. Pressure groups going into schools and pushing radical sexual ethics on children. And economical opposition.

Christians fearing the employment tribunal if they're too vocal about their beliefs. Nigel Farage isn't the only one who's been debanked. The Christian organisation Core Issues Trust had their Barclays account closed because of their Christian views.

So how do we respond to this opposition to Jesus and his gospel? Perhaps we might despair or become angry.

[3 : 29] Angry with others. Angry with God. Why don't you do something? And yet this parable shows us why Christians face opposition and how we can respond with realism, hope, and confidence.

Jesus first tells the parable in verses 24 to 30. Despite growing up in East Anglia, I don't know that much about farming. But I've seen both series of Clarkson's farm.

So I've got to learn the basics along with Jeremy Clarkson. But the story is simple enough. A man plants some good seeds. But an enemy comes in and sows weeds among the wheat.

The servants are confused. How has this happened? But the farmer knows exactly what's happening. An enemy has done this. The servants then ask the master whether they should get rid of the weeds.

The master says no. Instead let them grow together until a future harvest day. The weeds are going to be destroyed. The wheat gathered in the barn.

[4 : 39] And later the disciples come to Jesus for an explanation. And it's the weeds that they pick up on. Did you see that? Verse 36. They say to Jesus, Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.

That's what got them thinking. We can imagine their questions. Where do they come from? And why aren't they dealt with straight away? I guess that's questions we might have when thinking about opposition to the Lord Jesus and the gospel.

And so as Jesus explains the parable, we see how we should respond to opposition with realism and hope. Yes, opposition is demonic.

It will exist for a time. But it will be judged. And God's people will shine. Firstly, and the source, opposition is demonic.

Look down at verse 37. The one who sows the good seed is the son of man. The field is the world and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom.

[5 : 49] The weeds are the sons of the evil one. And the enemy who showed them is the devil. Here then is farmer Jesus. He breaks up the soil and he plants the seed.

It's good seeds. He nurtures it. He longs for a ripe harvest like a field of golden corn in late summer. He's growing righteous people, sons of the kingdom.

Those who belong to him. But Jesus is not the only one who is at work in the world. He has an enemy. Not the West Oxfordshire District Council like Jeremy Clarkson, but much, much worse.

End of verse 38. The weeds are the sons of the evil one. And the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The devil is real.

He is powerful and he is busy. He's busy disrupting the growth of God's kingdom. He's sowing different seed. His own people.

[6 : 56] Sons of the evil one. Well, Jesus is highlighting here that it's the devil who lies behind all unbelief. People who don't believe in the Lord Jesus are part of a bigger cosmic picture.

We got a hint of that a couple of weeks ago in the parable of the sower. With the evil one snatching the seed sown along the path. But now it's more fully explained. The devil's fingerprints are all over opposition to Jesus and his kingdom people.

One of my favourite TV shows is Line of Duty. I don't know if you've ever seen it. It's a special police branch called AC12. They're rooting out corrupt police officers.

And one of the overarching storylines that goes through all of the series, I think there's been six or five or six series, is that this search for H, the person who lies behind this web of organised crime.

H is the one calling the shots. The big boss behind it all. He is the enemy at work. Or she. I don't want to spoil it for you. The enemy at work.

[8 : 10] Well, just behind all the corruption and evil in the Line of Duty lies the opposition, lies the enemy, H. Behind all opposition to Jesus, all opposition to his people and his gospel, there is an enemy.

The devil. And this is not a shock reveal like it is in Line of Duty. Right from the start of creation up to here this morning, the devil has been seeking to disrupt God's kingdom.

Pulling the strings. Calling the shots. Sowing weeds. Not that to be a weed, a son of the evil one, you need to be a devil worshipper.

Drawing pentagrams or drinking goat's blood or something like that. You just have to not be on Jesus' side. To not trust in him for salvation.

For those of us who wouldn't call ourselves Christian, perhaps that is news to us. But Jesus is very clear. It's not like we are neutral and needed to be persuaded into God's kingdom.

[9 : 17] No, we are actually either children of the kingdom or children of the devil. A number of years ago, I watched a debate online between an atheist opposing the Christian faith and a Christian minister.

And the atheist told the minister, I don't believe in Satan. And the minister responded quick as a flash, that's because you are under his power. Why do Christians face opposition?

Well, there's many human factors involved. But behind it all, it's because the devil is at work. This is the world as it really is.

There is a devil at work in Dulwich, Hearn Hill, Sydenham, Forest Hill, wherever we live. Wherever we go on holiday this summer. Behind all opposition to Jesus and his kingdom people, the devil is at work.

Well, in the parable, the owner of the field knows he has an enemy. And we need to know that we have an enemy. It would be naive for a soldier to go to war, not expecting to meet the enemy or to be shot at.

[10 : 29] And likewise, we can't expect that we'll be the lucky ones who won't face opposition for our faith if we stand up for Jesus. We need to be real.

We need to be alert. Opposition is demonic. And so when we encounter opposition to Jesus and his gospel in our families, in the workplace, as we heard earlier from Peter, at school, in our neighborhoods, things haven't gone wrong.

Things have just gone normal because the devil is at work. This then is the source. Opposition is demonic. But how long will it go on for?

Well, secondly, then we need to see the timescale. It's the second point then. Delay. Opposition will continue alongside God's kingdom. So there are two forces active in the world.

Jesus growing sons of the kingdom, but the devil growing his sons. And initially in the parable, it's hard to tell the wheat and the weeds apart. But over time, the difference does become apparent.

[11 : 38] That's when the servants want to step in. At verse 28. So the servants said to him, Then do you want us to go and gather them?

But he said, No. Lest in gathering the weeds, you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. The servants want to take this decisive action and separate them.

But perhaps surprisingly, the farmer says no. Instead, he institutes a delay in dealing with the weeds. Meaning that Jesus has ordained a side-by-side existence of growth of his kingdom on one side and existence of evil and opposition on the other.

Growing together. So why is evil and suffering not dealt with once for all? That's actually a question I got a few weeks ago at a Christian union meeting at a local secondary school that I was leading.

A year eight pupil came along with a whole A4 sheet full of questions. It's quite daunting. And this was top of the list. Why doesn't God step in and end in all evil and wrong in the world?

[12 : 56] And I was working on this parable at the time, which was in God's sovereignty quite handy. So I had this parable in mind and I answered, Well, because of this in this room. Because of us in this room.

I said, it's like God has got this big red stop button. He can press it whenever he wants. And he can end all evil, all disease, all oppression, all injustice, all sadness, gone.

Or he can allow another day for his kingdom to grow. For people to hear about Jesus and come to him for forgiveness.

I asked the question to the group, Would you or I love the world enough to not press the button? Not sure I would.

But God does. That's why it's still growing season. That's why the harvest hasn't come yet. So what could be so important to warrant a delay in dealing with opposition to Jesus and evil?

[14 : 01] What could be more important than the full arrival of the kingdom? Well, the answer is us. I, for one, am so glad that God didn't push the button and bring the harvest before I became a Christian.

Before I made the transfer from weed to wheat. And I guess we could go around the room this morning and it'll be the same for many of us. So for a time, opposition will continue to exist alongside God's kingdom.

But there will also be opportunity. If you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, then now is the time to come into the kingdom. The transfer window is still open, we might say.

Now is the time to receive the offer, to take advantage of the delay. And for those of us who are already following Jesus, well, opposition to the gospel is not anything new.

It's not a sign of failure. It's not a sign to give up. Because God has held back pushing the button for one more day.

[15 : 15] So more people can come into his kingdom. And yet opposition is still temporary. There will be a harvest. The final whistle will blow at some point.

The devil may have his moments strutting around. His time is limited. God is in control and he will choose when to call time on this world.

The servants in this story, they long to root up the weeds straight away. But they need to be patient. And so it is for us here this morning. We can be confident in Jesus' kingdom that he will grow.

And yet we are to be patient in the face of opposition. It will continue to exist alongside God's kingdom. Also the gospel can continue to exist going out.

And so we are to remember the source. Opposition is demonic. And remember the time scale. There is a delay. Opposition will continue to exist. Opposition is still temporary.

[16 : 22] And next, Jesus fast forwards to the end. So thirdly then the end. Opposition will be judged. The farmer explains the plan to his servants in verse 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 harvest will come and there will be two outcomes. Barn or burn. Jesus explains that in verse 40. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so it will be at the close of the age.

The Son of Man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all lawbreakers and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The image is stark, isn't it? And when we read of a fiery furnace, we're not to think of a warming your hands on a fire on bonfire night. Think more of the wildfires ripping through South Europe.

[17 : 35] It is a powerful image. The weeds will be removed. They have no place in God's kingdom. In Line of Duty, the most recent series ended with the corrupt officer H being exposed and judged and sent to prison.

And yet because it's a popular series, it left the door open for future series of more corruption and opposition to root out. But at the close of this age, the judgment, the condemnation will be full and final.

All causes of sin, all lawbreakers, all opposition to Jesus dealt with. Now, in the face of opposition, many churches fall over themselves to match the culture, to fit in.

And the danger is that we seem so desperate to do anything to bring people into the church that we give the impression that the same is true of Jesus. So desperate that he will say anything to get people into his kingdom.

Yet the truth is, Jesus will allow no compromise here. Notice verse 41, it's Jesus, the son of man, who sweeps away all evil at the end of the age.

[18 : 51] This is not little Jesus, meek and mild, who will welcome me to heaven because he's slightly desperate. But Jesus coming in anger, pursuing justice.

At one level, this gives us great confidence, actually. Opposition will be judged. Satan won't win. Opposition will be dealt with.

That means we can continue to live for Jesus and to speak for Jesus. And yet at the same time, we are to react with compassion by warning others.

It's been said that parenting is mostly doing three things on repeat. It's saying shoes to your children a lot, moving cups away from the edge of the table and warning your children about being in a car park.

I did it this morning. We warn because we love and we want our children to be alert to the danger because we care for them.

[19 : 54] Well, here is the Lord Jesus, the most compassionate person who has ever walked the earth, warning us about the danger of what opposition to him leads to.

All because he loves us. If he didn't love us, then he wouldn't warn us. But like a loving parent warns over and over again, Jesus warns us over and over again in the Bible of his coming judgment for those who haven't put their trust in him.

He is the one, more than any other in the Bible, who talks about hell and the reality of his judgment. We hear warnings all the time, don't we?

And I guess the more we hear something, we just, it washes over us. Please mind the gap between the train and the platform. I mean, as warnings go, it's quite polite, isn't it?

So polite, and we hear it so often that we just don't really think about it that much anymore, perhaps. We don't take it seriously. Yet latest figures from TFL show around 300 people are injured getting on or off a train.

- [21 : 02] Though most of them minor, but some are serious. Well, here is the major warning of eternal significance. We cannot simply amble into heaven as if our sin didn't matter.
- Lawbreakers will be removed from God's kingdom. And that is us. If we've not turned to Jesus for forgiveness. The question is, do we believe that?
- Perhaps some of us here this morning feel committed to the neutral zone. But Jesus says we either belong to him and his kingdom or we don't. Wheat or weeds.
- So the question for each of us to ask ourselves is, are we clear on where we stand before the Lord Jesus this morning? And yet the whole heart of the gospel is that all of us are by nature lawbreakers and sinners.
- But Jesus took the full heat of God's anger in our place that we may no longer be sons of the evil one, but sons of the kingdom. No longer facing the burn, but the barn.
- [22 : 09] No longer facing eternal death, but eternal life. You see, there is a delay, but the close of the age will come. All opposition and sin will be dealt with.
- There will be justice and in the face of opposition, we aren't to compromise but have confidence. God is growing his kingdom and one day God will push the button and all sin will be dealt with.
- And whereas the weeds have a bleak future, God's people have a bright future to look forward to. So this is fourthly and very briefly the hope, a bright future for the righteous.
- So whereas the weeds are burned, the wheat will be gathered into the barn. And Jesus goes on to explain their significance in verse 43. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father.
- He who has ears let him hear. I wonder if you remember the famous slogan the future's bright, the future's orange.
- [23 : 21] For a time it was going great. Remember Orange Wednesdays and going to the cinema two for one? Loved it. And yet the slogan has proved not to be true isn't it? Because orange no longer exists.
- The future is not orange. The future wasn't bright for orange actually. Yet for the Christian we can say with great confidence that the future is very bright.
- The future is eternal righteousness. Previously the wheat was growing among the weeds seeking to disrupt. At the harvest at the end of the age God's people will shine.
- No more causes to sin. No more weeds. And so often our experience of being opposed is one of shame. We tend to hide ourselves.
- And we are hidden really. People can't see the majesty of Jesus. His purposes seem hidden. Our meetings seem small and weak. We're held up for shame and ridicule.
- [24 : 26] But this parable shows us with great confidence that shame will be overcome. There will be a day when Jesus will return. His righteousness will be seen.
- We will shine like the sun if we are trusting in him. Because our God is so much greater than any opposition. We have a great future to look forward to.
- So as we face growing opposition in our culture today, opposition to Jesus in the world, the parable of the weeds teaches us to be real.
- That opposition is demonic. It is from the devil, ultimately. We have an enemy. And it will continue to exist because God loves the world so much to delay the harvest in order to grow sons of the kingdom.
- Yet the harvest will come. Opposition is judged and it will end. And those on Jesus' side will shine in his kingdom with him forever.

[25 : 31] Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are clear to us that there is an enemy at work.

That the devil is seeking to disrupt. your kingdom but we thank you that we can have confidence that you will grow your kingdom despite a delay, despite opposition, and that there will be a harvest.

Please help us to know how that impacts our lives this week, this year, as we live in the delay. Amen.

time. Thank you. I love you. And two things are true to love you might Bettie, has come.■.
Here