



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermons

“Why Doesn’t God Do Something?”

Matthew 13.24-30, 36-43, 47-50

David Anguish

Introduction

1. It’s a cry for relief God’s people have expressed for centuries.
 - a. “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” (Psa 13.1).
 - b. “O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you ‘Violence!’ and you will not save?” (Hab 1.2).
 - c. “. . . knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation’” (2 Pet 3.3-4).
 - d. “They cried out with a loud voice, ‘O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’” (Rev 6.10).
 - e. “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22.20).
2. We often battle to resist weariness and despair. We want relief from our pain, our failures, an illness, the evil of our world. In our reflective and candid moments, we understand, although we do not agree with, the sentiments of those who wonder (or skeptically scoff about) where God is and why he allows things to continue as they do.
3. The parables in our study this time speak to these and related concerns.

Body

I. Context and Connection.

A. Let’s remember our context.

1. As we have seen, Jesus was explaining the virtues of heaven’s kingdom in the face of mounting opposition to his ministry and the very natural and honest questions that circumstance had prompted among his followers.
2. Remember the main ideas of the other parables we have studied from Matthew 13.

- a. Many do not hear the word because they will not, but the word will produce understanding and fruit among those who will hear (13.1-9, 18-23).
 - b. Although it may look small and ineffective, God's reign is in fact powerful and will eventually bring great and productive change (13.31-33).
 - c. Therefore, his reign is worth the greatest price we can pay to experience it (13.44-46).
 3. Still, it often doesn't *look* like these things are happening; so additional questions are to be expected.
 - a. Jesus' first disciples would have wondered how these things could be so if:
 - 1) Jesus was not going to overthrow the Romans
 - 2) The leaders were gaining ground in their efforts to destroy him.
 - b. Matthew's original readers would have wondered how these things could be so when so many, especially among the Israelites, refused to accept their message and were persecuting them.
 - c. We may also occasionally wonder as we consider that the world still stands and things do not seem to be looking any better.
 4. The two parables in this study reassure us.
- B. Why study these parables together?
1. Because they were told to different audiences (see v. 36), they are separated in chapter 13.
 2. But they are companion parables in the same way the parables of the mustard seed and leaven and the hidden treasure and pearl are companion parables. Notice the overlap of vv. 40-42 with vv. 49-50.

II. Analysis of the Stories.

A. Wheat and tares (vv. 24-30).

1. Things in the "kingdom of heaven" are like those experienced by a man seeking a great wheat harvest.
2. His goal is frustrated (though not thwarted) by an enemy who sows weeds (literally, darnel) among his wheat,¹ something that was known to happen and violated Roman law.²
 - a. This was a poisonous plant that looked like wheat, especially in its early stages.
 - b. As it grew with the wheat, its roots wrapped around the wheat roots in a way that made it impossible to pull up the weeds without harming the wheat.
 - c. So, the man waited until the harvest, at which time he could separate the weeds from the wheat, saving the latter while burning the former (darnel was used for fuel when wood was low³).

B. The dragnet (vv. 47-48).

¹ The ESV footnote indicates that "weeds" could be translated "darnel." The Greek word is ζιζάνιον (*zizanian*), defined as "a particularly undesirable weed resembling wheat and possessing a seed which is poisonous—"darnel"" (Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. 2d, Accordance electronic ed., version 4.2. New York: United Bible Societies, 1989.).

² See R. T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 225.

³ *Ibid.*, 227.

1. The manner of fishing described here used a seine net (σαγήνη; *sagēnē*) with floats at the top and weights at the bottom. When thrown into the water, it encircled the fish and then was dragged on to the shore. The net thus gathered fish indiscriminately.
 2. Someone then had to separate the good from the bad (clean from unclean); it was common at Capernaum to see fishermen sitting on the beach at the end of the day doing that very thing.
- C. Jesus' interpretation (vv. 36-43, 49-50).
1. We are tempted to see these parables in terms of the sincere and insincere within the church but, in light of Jesus' explanation of the wheat and weeds parable, this is unlikely (it is not possible with the wheat and weeds and is at best unlikely in the parable of the dragnet).⁴
 2. Fortunately, as with the parable of the sower, Jesus provided an interpretation.
 - a. Jesus is the one who sows the good seed.
 - b. The field is the world (not the church).⁵
 - c. The good seed represents the sons of the kingdom.
 - d. The weeds represent the sons of the evil one.
 - e. The enemy is the devil.
 - f. The harvest is the end of the age.
 - g. The reapers are angels (in the dragnet, they are the ones who separate the "fish").
 3. The point.
 - a. For Jesus' hearers: the kingdom was growing despite appearances and God would one day make everything plain and right.
 - 1) It was a process, not an immediately realized reality.
 - 2) This also serves as a reminder that the reign Jesus was inaugurating was not a political entity after the manner of David.
 - b. For Matthew's readers: the point is the same though the emphasis is different.
 - 1) Judgment might be delayed, but it was nonetheless inevitable.
 - 2) The world, led by the devil, would continue to resist, but would eventually face a day of reckoning.
 - 3) What was important was to not be guilty of being one of the "causes of sin" (σκάνδαλον; *skandalon*)⁶ or "law-breakers" (ἀνομία; *anomia*) (v. 41), "two of the most grievous offenses depicted in Matthew's Gospel (. . . see 18:6-7; . . . 7:23; 23:28; 24:12)."⁷

III. Reminders for Persevering Disciples.

A. About God and judgment.

1. Satan is active in the world; though mortally wounded, he continues to fight, trying to capture many as possible (cf. 1 Pet 5.8).

⁴ See Donald A. Hagner, "Matthew's Parables of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:1-52)," in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 119.

⁵ The phrase, "out of his kingdom" (v. 41) "does not necessarily imply that the 'sons of the evil one' were once in it, but that they have no place in it when it is fully consummated" (France, 226).

⁶ In a footnote, the CSB gives the alternate translation, "stumbling" for "cause sin." The NASB translates "all stumbling blocks."

⁷ Hagner, 112.

-
2. We need to avoid quick judgments about people; in fact, leave the judging to God.
 3. Judgment may be slow (“as some count slowness”—2 Pet 3:9), but it will come.
- B. Evil and suffering are not the end; God will redeem and administer justice in his time.
- C. Despite appearances, perseverance is worth the effort.

Conclusion

1. Consider Romans 8.18 – “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”
2. We all need reminders that God’s plan will ultimately be realized and that we who serve him will eventually live with him in glory. Life under his reign is worth it all.

www.davidanguish.com