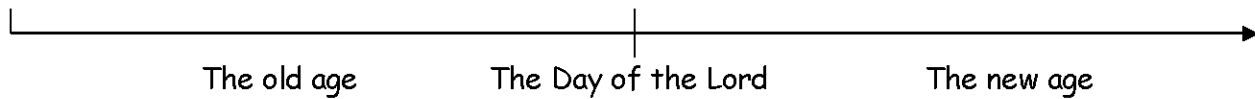


March 8, 2009
Weeds, Wheat, Waiting ...
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Great Expectations

Have you ever waited expectantly for something ... And when it finally came to pass it was radically different than you anticipated. At first, you were crushed and disappointed. But as you came to terms with reality, you came to appreciate how perfect the truth really was ...

Most first century Jews expected the Christ/Messiah to be a great military ruler who would crush the Romans and reestablish the golden days of King David. The enemy to be defeated was the Romans. If only the oppressors were driven out, paradise would be established in Israel. History looked like this:



We know - in hindsight - that this is not what happens! The real problem was not the Romans - the real issue is human sinfulness. Even if the Romans were driven out, Israel would still be a mess because of sinful people: the Pharisees would still be demanding strict rule-following; the Sadducees would be pedaling their agenda; people would still be sick; there would still be crime ... And what about the rest of the world? Was there any good news for Greeks? Parthians? Phoenicians? Ethiopians? Britons? Gauls? Goths? Celts? Even Romans?

Jesus comes, as Messiah, to defeat the power of sin - the real enemy at the root of all problems - once and for all - by dying the death we all deserve. And then He would rise again. That is the great news we anticipate as we approach Easter. It is good news for all nations - not just Israel! History looks more like this:



The reality is that we live in this very odd time in which the Kingdom of God has come ...

- Jesus has died upon the cross to pay for all of our sins.
- He has risen from the dead to demonstrate that God is more powerful than Satan.
- We are filled with the personal presence of God through the Holy Spirit
- The church, which is God's family, is a community of His people

- We know that we have eternal life: our lives are in safe in God's hands - today and forever

It's a radically different world than before Jesus' coming - when none of these things was true. These are all truths and experiences that define who we are and always will be ...

BUT (and it's a big "but"), although we experience all of these blessings that come from a restored relationship with God, Satan is still alive and well and causing all sorts of mayhem. So we live in this dual world of the kingdom of God and Satan's power at work for evil. The kingdom has come with Jesus, but the old age has not yet been eliminated. One day, some day, all of that evil will be ultimately and finally destroyed when Jesus returns again.

Wheat and Weeds

This is the context or the background to the parable we're looking at today. This is a "*The kingdom of God is like ...*" parable - it is about this in between time in which we live. The kingdom is real ... but so is the presence and power of evil.

A farmer (Jesus v.37) sows good wheat ("people of the kingdom" v.38) in his field ("the world" v.38). The kingdom of God/heaven is not a geographical location, of course, but a spiritual realm where God rules and where his people share in his eternal life. "King - dom" is the "domain of the king." We become "people of the kingdom" - citizens - children of God - when we receive the gift of salvation that comes through Jesus. When we believe in Him we become His good wheat, sowed in the world.

BUT, the enemy of the kingdom of God, the devil, is engaged in some industrial sabotage. It is usually supposed that the weed is a plant called darnel - when it is young it looks like wheat, but as it grows its true identity becomes clear. Darnel was actually poisonous - there was (and still is - no known antidote). So the activity of the enemy ("the devil" v.39) is horrible. Under Roman law to sow darnel in a person's wheat field was a criminal offence.

As time passes, then, it becomes clear that the field has both good wheat and poisonous darnel growing in it. In other words, we live in a world where there are "people of the kingdom" - those who love Jesus and seek to follow His ways - and "people of the evil one" - those who have rejected Jesus and thus, follow the priorities, values, ethics, and ways of the old age.

Does this describe our experience, today? I think it is a reasonable description of reality! The "old age" is a world that has existed since the most ancient civilizations ... a world where:

- You are evaluated based on how much wealth you have, how powerful are, and how "good" you look (according to the criteria of the times);
- You - and your personal advancement - are the most important thing in life;
- "Fun" and "pleasure" - however you define them - are among your primary motivators
- Absolute truth and authority are bad words!

The same spirit infuses "old age" spirituality. For instance the spirit of the Pharisees was eerily

reminiscent of the values of contemporary popular culture: workaholism, judgmentalism, impress-others-ism, and self-centredness. The same has been true of many Christians over the centuries - religion was all about rule-keeping, thou-shalt-nots. It is a hard, dog-eat-dog way to live. Rather than bringing joy and fulfillment it brings stress, angst, fear, worry, and despair.

In contrast, the fundamental values of the kingdom of God centre on the great commands to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, And to love your neighbour as yourself.

"People of the Kingdom" ...

- live as disciples of Jesus; we learn from Him how to live life;
- make worship, prayer, and learning from Jesus priorities;
- know God is a God of mission; we aim to serve God with our lives;
- choose to live by God's standards, ethics, and values.

All tied up together

We live in a world where good and evil coexist side-by-side. It's often not easy to tell the difference!

- As you look through the list of the twelve apostles, good and evil co-exist even here - Judas, the betrayer, is among these people!
- Even within individuals (like Peter) there is conflict between good and evil: Peter will be the one who affirms Jesus is the Christ (Matthew 16:16) and the same one who will deny knowing Jesus when He is arrested.

We experience this confusion, too. At the personal level, we know that we are influenced both by Jesus, who sows good seed, and the evil one, who sows weeds ... so beware! None of us is perfect. It's a constant struggle to identify those thoughts, emotions, and actions that come from the Holy Spirit, and those that come from the devil.

Joe Kapolyo, a Zambian, who is a pastor in North London, writes, "*On the corporate level ... this parable makes it plain that it is pointless to search for the perfect local church or denomination. There will always be weeds in the crop. Moreover, it is sometimes hard to distinguish between those who are of the kingdom and those who are not. We must, therefore, not be quick to judge, as we can easily make mistakes and damage the good seed ...*"

So what do I do?

For the owner's servants, the answer was simple - just rip out the weeds, right? In our terms, the answer is simple - get rid of all the evil people, right? Wouldn't weed-whacking be fun! But the problem in the field is that the roots of the wheat and darnel are inextricably woven together; to rip out weeds would destroy the wheat. The challenge for us is this interwovenness within our own lives - we are all a little bit evil. None of us is perfectly good. Within the church we have all shades of grey. What do we do? How do we know who to get rid of?

In the past, people have tried all sorts of criteria for judging and disciplining people - inevitably

it ends up in a list of rules and regulations (just like the Pharisees): You agree to the "right" statement of faith (whether you actually believe it or not, do the "right things", even read the "right" translation of the Bible (and you don't do all the "wrong" things, read the "wrong" Bible, associate with the "wrong" people, etc., etc., etc.) The first problem with this, of course, is that some people can do and say all the right things (and not do or say all the wrong things), but not be disciples of Jesus! Their lives may not evidence any of the fruit of Spirit, the joy of Christ, or look at all like Jesus' life. The second problem is that good, godly people, can be whacked - judged harshly - and brutally hurt.

The reality, which Jesus emphasizes in this parable, is that we are not able to judge - we dare not judge - we must not judge. That is Jesus' task, not ours. When He comes again there will be a time of judgment, but that is His business (and it is serious business!), not ours.

This parable

- Is an assurance that despite the ambiguity now, the kingdom of God is very much alive and well among us - and it will ultimately triumph. At the same time, we cannot expect perfection this side of judgment day. But when we are tempted to despair at all the evil in the world - when get disillusioned by evil the church - when we struggle with temptation in our own lives - remember that God wins!
- Encourages us to resist evil! This parable does not imply passivity. In contrast, it is an encouragement that we can be about the business of growing as healthy wheat ourselves. And we can encourage and help other wheat - other people - to recognize good and evil, truth and error, right and wrong. And we can encourage them to learn and grow, to be insightful and wise, to walk with clear vision and care, and to recognize and resist evil. There is an educational mandate here - to help people walk wisely and well.

Dr. John Sentamu, Anglican Archbishop of York, writes, "*Victor Hugo said that, 'There is one thing stronger than all the armies in the world: and that is, an idea whose time has come'. Corporate-discipleship was Jesus' big idea and plan for the renewal of society; a catalyst and engine for building God's Kingdom. His idea, which has lasted over the centuries, was simply this: a mixed community of sinners called to be saints, a divine society where the risen Christ in the midst of it is grace and truth, and the Holy Spirit is at work within it. An inclusive and generous friendship, where each person is affirmed as of infinite worth, dignity and influence. A community of love, overflowing in gratitude and wholehearted surrender, because it participates in the life of God. This corporate-discipleship, we call the Church, worships God and infects the world with righteousness.*"

That is the call we have - to be the wheat of the world.

Copyright ©2009 by Bruce Martin
First Baptist Church
1614 - 5th Avenue South, Lethbridge, AB T1J 0W3
(403) 327-2082
bruce@firstb.net