

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:
Dr. Stephen Felker
Swift Creek Baptist Church, 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
5/21/06

Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43 “Why Doesn’t God Put an End to Evil?”

Intro. Have you ever wondered why God hasn’t yet intervened to put an end to evil? Have you wondered why Jesus didn’t set up an earthly kingdom long ago? And why have almost 2,000 years passed, and Christ still has not returned? Well I am going to deal with such questions from my text today.

Chapter 13 of Matthew contains 7 of the parables that Jesus spoke to describe various aspects of the kingdom period between the first coming of Christ and His second coming. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. According to vv.11-15, Jesus started speaking in parables because most of the people had rejected what He was teaching them. As John 1:11 says, “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.” Since they rejected His plain teaching, Jesus would now primarily speak publicly in parables. Fortunately, we have our Lord’s own interpretation of His parable in vv.36-43.

Our parable today explains the apparent contradiction between the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, and what Jesus turned out to be. The Old Testament, and John the Baptist, prophesied that the Messiah would judge the wicked, and save the righteous, and set up an earthly kingdom of peace and justice. But Jesus Christ did not do that. Is He therefore not the Messiah? In fact, John the Baptist must have wondered about this, for He sent messengers to Jesus, asking if He is indeed the Messiah they were looking for. So this parable gives the reason why Jesus did not immediately fulfill the Jewish Messianic expectations. And this morning we are going to solve to some degree the mystery of why He hasn’t already put an end to evil, & set up His earthly Kingdom. So let’s look at this passage together.

I. THE MISSION OF JESUS

I’m convinced that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, and He was sent by God to accomplish a mission. And what is that mission? Well our text gives us some clues. According to v.37, the “man who sowed good seed in his field” represents Jesus Christ. And according to v.24, His actions are intended to establish the Kingdom of God, which is first of all the establishment of the rule of God over people. So Jesus came to bring men and women, boys and girls, under the rule of God. The Gospel of Matthew has many references to this. Mt. 4:23 says, “And Jesus went about all Galilee... preaching the gospel of the kingdom...” He taught us to pray in Mt. 6:10, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” He said in Mt. 7:21, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” So the mission of Jesus was to establish the rule of God over our lives. And when we repent of sin, and yield to the Lordship of Christ, then according to v.38, we become “sons of the kingdom,” i.e. children of God.

Today, the Kingdom of God finds expression within the church. A church is a group of people who have repented of sin, believed in Jesus, and yielded our lives to the Lordship of Christ. Christ is the Head of the Church. He reigns over His people from the throne in heaven. And we are to obey Him. There is still a future, earthly manifestation of the Kingdom of God over the whole

earth. But right now, the Kingdom of God is limited to heaven, and limited to the hearts of believers.

But notice from v.41 of our text who does not belong in the Kingdom of God, “those who practice lawlessness,” that is, those who do not submit to God’s authority, or anyone else’s authority! That word describes someone who lives to please self; who makes his own rules. Such a person does not want anyone telling them how to live their life.

The recent Grammy awards illustrate the disconnect between professing faith in God, and obedience. The members of the group that won the award for best song thanked God for the victory then immediately followed with profanities that had to be bleeped from the broadcast. It seems as if God is in, but obeying God is not. Even so, many Americans are living a dual life – one filled with good feelings about God and faith, and another in which they believe they are in control of their own destiny and operate apart from Him.¹

But Christ wants to establish His kingdom over your heart. And I can assure you that God can run your life a whole lot better than you can. Furthermore, you will be much better off submitting to the rule of God. The Heavenly Father knows best.

A. The Means of Accomplishing this Mission – How is Christ going to establish His kingdom in this world? Now according to v.24, He does it by sowing “good seed in his field.” And in v.38 the good seed refers to “the sons of the kingdom.” In other words, Christ is spreading His Kingdom in this world by placing believers in various communities all over the world. Ever since Pentecost the Lord has been sowing generation after generation of His saints into the world. They are scattered everywhere.

Now there is an important lesson born out by v.30. The servants wanted to uproot & remove the tares, but the landowner said in v.30, “Let both grow together until the harvest....” Now according to v.38, the wheat represent God’s people, while the tares represent unbelievers, who are aligned with Satan. And notice that until Jesus comes again, God expects us to mix and mingle with unbelievers. I can think of no other purpose for this than to be a witness to unbelievers. We are not to isolate ourselves from unbelievers. While not partaking in their sins, we need to be intentional about cultivating relationships with them. Then we need to look for opportunities to share our faith with them. We need to lead people to surrender their lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

George & Helen Angone are back in town visiting with us. They bought a place in south Florida. It’s a retirement community. They shared with some of us on Friday night about how they have been able to be a witness to the residents in that little community. Helen ministered to a lady who had lost her husband. She gave the woman her own Bible. She has been reading it every day. George does a lot for the people in that community, and many have a hard time understanding why he would do so much good for people, and not expect anything in return. Well you see, they understand the principle that Jesus is teaching here. God expands His kingdom by planting us among unbelievers.

B. The Extent of this Mission – In v.38 Jesus says, “The field is the world.” In the parable the field belongs to the master, and the world thus belongs to Christ. He is the rightful owner. And so Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven is to spread through the whole earth, and not just one little particular nation. In fact, when Jesus later commissioned His disciples, He commanded them to make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:19). He told them to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8).

¹ From the 3/6/2006 *Barna Report*.

This is the mission that we have received from Jesus. We are to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth. We are to continue this mission of calling upon people to repent of their sin, and trust in Jesus as Savior, and yield to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We must continue to send out missionaries. We must continue to support the spread of the Gospel. And to a large degree this mission has been fulfilled, just as Jesus indicated. There are very few nations or language groups left that do not have a single believer. Yet there are still many tribes & local communities where the sons of the Kingdom have not been planted as Gospel witnesses. We need to do more to carry out the mission of our Lord.

Where does God want to plant you? Are you willing to be planted in a factory surrounded by unbelievers? Young people, are you willing to be a witness for Christ at school? Are you willing to cultivate a friendship with an unbeliever? Are you willing to go on the mission field?

Ah, but in contrast to the mission of Jesus, we see in this parable:

II. THE MISSION OF SATAN

In v.25 Jesus speaks of the enemy of the landowner. In v.39 He identifies the enemy as the Devil. Jesus believed in a personal devil, and He taught about him. He is the great adversary. He seeks to hurt the landowner by sowing bad seed in his field. As for the historical possibility of this, to this day in India one of the direst threats which a man can make to his enemy is, "I will sow bad seed in your field."

Now the enemy in this parable was truly evil. He animated by malice and hatred. He would not benefit from his evil act. It was purely an act of hatred. Even so, Satan hates God and seeks to disrupt everything God does. You can count on him to oppose, hinder, and counter the work of God with tireless persistence. Furthermore, this enemy is cowardly. He waits until everybody is fast asleep, so that he will not be seen and caught. Even so, the devil is sneaky and deceitful. 2 Cor. 11:14 says that "Satan ... transforms himself into an angel of light." He doesn't show his true colors, so to speak.

V.39 is relevant to the question of the origin of evil. Where does misery and wickedness come from? In v.27 the servants of the landowner said, "Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field?" Of course he only sowed good seed. Even so, God only sows good seed. He only does good. Then the servants ask, "How then does it have tares?" In v.28 the owner says, "An enemy has done this." And v.39 says "The enemy that sowed them is the devil." God is not the source of evil; the devil is!

Now as we seek to carry on the mission of Jesus, we need to understand that we have an enemy as well. Satan will oppose us every step of the way. And we need to understand the methods of Satan, so we may be prepared to fight against his diabolical schemes. In 2 Cor. 2:11 the apostle Paul says, "lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices." So what are the methods of Satan? Now the primary method mentioned in this parable is this:

A. Sowing His "Sons" among God's People - Now to understand the parable, you must understand the meaning of "tares." The traditional rendering "tares" for the Greek word *zizanion* is unfortunate. It actually refers to bearded darnel, which in its earlier stages is indistinguishable from wheat (v.26). They look just alike. So the devil's method is that of mingling the counterfeit with the real. When the "wheat" of God is sown in the world, the devil places his children in the midst of what God has sown. In other words, wherever Christ sows a true Christian, Satan comes and sows a

counterfeit. He began in the days of the apostles. Judas and Simon Magus were just two of the examples of darnel among the wheat.

Even so, people today can outwardly appear to be Christians, but Jesus warns that some are not true believers. They profess faith. They are religiously active, but they are not true believers. Jesus has already warned in Mt. 7:15, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.” A person may look like a Christian, go to church like a Christian, and even talk like a Christian, but not be a Christian!

Well how can we tell if someone is a wolf in sheep’s clothing? Or how can we tell if someone is like a tare, instead of wheat? Better yet, how can we tell if *we ourselves* are just tares among wheat? Jesus said earlier, “By their fruit you shall know them.” Just watch what happens over time. You see, it is not until the wheat & the tares are headed out is it possible to distinguish them. The darnel produces grains that are black or grey, in contrast to the light brown color of wheat. Over 100 prayed to receive Christ in our recent revival & youth rally. The ones who were not serious, or who failed to repent of sin, or who did not have true faith, will not follow through with baptism and active church attendance. But the ones who were truly saved will. Jesus said in John 8:31, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.”

B. Producing Bad Results - The devil accomplishes the following negative results:

1. Some Falsely Assume They Are Saved – There are plenty of tares that look like wheat, and there are plenty of people who outwardly look & act like Christians, and so they think they are Christians. So in Mt. 7:22 Jesus said, “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’” And yet Jesus says that they will be cast out. They will not go to heaven.

2. God’s Work Is Hurt & Weakened – Satan sows unbelievers everywhere, including into the membership of churches. He sowed unbelievers into Israel as well. The mixed multitude became a snare to the people of Israel. They rebelled against Moses’ leadership. They spread unbelief. They set a bad example to others regarding idolatry & immorality. And just as the mixed multitude caused problems for the people of Israel, they cause problems in the church. The devil can use a hypocrite in the church to a much greater advantage than He can a person who lives in sin and does not profess to be a Christian.²

Before I move on, I want to make an appeal to anyone who is not yet a Christian. Don’t allow the presence of hypocrites keep you from Christ, or keep you from coming to church. Jesus warned that there would be hypocrites among God’s people. I can assure you that you will not be able to use the presence of hypocrites among God’s people as an excuse at the Day of Judgment.

So we have seen the mission of Jesus, and in contrast to that, we’ve seen the mission of Satan. Now let’s consider:

III. THE MYSTERY OF THE KINGDOM

In this parable Jesus is revealing something that was unknown, and unforeseen in the Old Testament, or even by John the Baptist. The mystery is indicated in the element of surprise stated in v.27, “Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?” The servants

² This is one reason why Baptists believe that only saved, born again people should be members of a church. And back in the old days you had to give some evidence that you were a true believer before you were accepted as a member of a Baptist Church. And if you ever gave evidence by your life that you were not a Christian, you would be given opportunity to repent. And if you did not, you would be dismissed from the membership of the church!

were surprised by the presence of the tares, and that there are so many. What may have been even more surprising was the fact that the master told them to leave the tares alone, and not try to remove them from the field.

Now what's the parallel to the present manifestation of the Kingdom of God?

A. The Mystery Stated - Well Jesus the Messiah has come, the Kingdom of God has begun in the hearts of His followers, but unbelievers who promote evil are not going to be uprooted & removed, at least for now. This is the mystery of the kingdom. This was shocking to the audience of Jesus. The crowd had heard John the Baptist's fiery prophecies of the king who would come, fan in hand, to "purge His floor," and were looking for a kingdom which was to be inaugurated by swift destruction of the wicked. But that is not the way the kingdom of heaven was to be founded by Jesus and grow. Right now the Kingdom of God grows almost imperceptibly to the world. The Kingdom of Satan is not now being overthrown with violence and an overwhelming display of God's power. It will not gradually wane and disappear. In fact, many New Testament Scriptures indicate that evil will get worse and worse, with the greatest intensity of evil occurring during the Great Tribulation. Yet according to vv.40-41, there *will* come a time when Jesus will come again, & He will purge this world of Satan, and of all evil. This is the mystery of the parable of the tares.

Now what does this mean to us? Well, true believers have received God's reign and have already begun to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom age. Yet, we must be patient while we continue to live in this evil age, and intermingle with the wicked of society. We have been waiting almost 2,000 years now. So until Jesus comes again, we must rub shoulders with the wicked. We must go into their shops, buy their products, work alongside them, and in many other ways deal with them. But we must not partake of their wickedness. We must always separate ourselves from the *sins* of the world, without separating ourselves from the sinners of the world.

B. The Mystery Justified – Why didn't God judge the world & establish an earthly kingdom back in the first century? Why does He seem to do nothing about the presence of evil in the world? Well notice that the Master told the servants in vv.29-30 to leave the tares alone, & let them grow along side the true believers during this present age.³ There are several reasons why Christ has chosen to follow the approach He has taken:

1. To Keep from Hurting the Righteous in Society – In v.29 the master says, "No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them." You see, the good wheat could be hurt by pulling up the darnel, for their roots would be too interlaced. Even so, men are to be patient while we wait for the judgment of God. In v.28 the servants wanted to pull up & gather the tares. Even so, if we get impatient and try to carry out God's judgment ourselves, some of God's people will get hurt in the process. For example, the Anabaptists and our Baptist forefathers were tortured and persecuted even to death because the established church considered them heretics. The established church was wrong and much bloodshed would have been avoided if they had taken heed to this parable. There are always problems when church & state merge together.

2. To Keep from Destroying Those Who May *Become* Righteous - Even though this reason is not specifically stated in the parable, this is a truth that should be considered. Do you want

³ Is this prohibition, then, meant to forbid the attempt to keep the Church membership pure from un-Christian members? First of all, the field is not the church but the world (v.38a). Jesus is talking about tares in the world, not tares mixed in the church. No doubt, tares are in the Church, and the parable has a bearing on it, but its lesson is much wider. We are not to try to uproot the tares from the face of the earth. As we shall see, that is the role of Christ at his second coming. So this parable is not relevant to the subject of church discipline.

to know why Jesus hasn't come again? Do you know why judgment hasn't yet fallen upon this wicked world? Well Peter tells us in 2 Pet. 3:9, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." We must remember the contrasting purposes of the first coming of Jesus and His Second Coming. John 3:17 says, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." This is the age of grace and salvation. Right now we are to be about leading people to repentance and faith in Christ. And the Lord will not come back & judge the world & set up His Kingdom until we complete the mission of sharing the Gospel with every nation, tribe, and tongue on the face of the earth.

So we must be careful regarding our attitude toward unbelievers. The servants were willing to gather out the tares, just as the righteous have a tendency to want to get rid of the wicked. We need to focus instead on converting the wicked, not judging them. God will take care of that at the right time.

IV. THE MANIFESTATION OF THE KINGDOM

Some day the mystery of the kingdom will end, and the full manifestation of the kingdom will begin. This will take place at the Second Coming of Christ. Yes, this present evil age will not continue forever. V.39 refers to the end⁴ of the age. And when Jesus comes again, at least 3 long-awaited prophecies of the Old Testament will be fulfilled.

A. The Wicked Will be Judged - Some day there will be an end of the "mixed society." Jesus says in v.40, "Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age." Though the final judgment of the wicked has been delayed, it is nevertheless sure to come. A day of reckoning is coming. Moses warned long ago, "Be sure your sins will find you out." You cannot run from God eternally. This world belongs to God. It doesn't belong to you, or to the Communists, or to any dictators. And He has a right to remove all evil from it.

Then He warns in v.42 that the angels will take those who practice lawlessness, and "will cast them into the furnace of fire." Have you ever seen a red-hot furnace at a steel mill? Well that gives you a picture of what hell will be like.

A faithful Scottish preacher once had occasion to pass a factory where glass was manufactured. Finding the door open, he stepped in. Soon he stood before the cavernous opening of the furnace. He stared at the seething flames as if hypnotized, and finally exclaimed to himself: "Oh, what must hell be like!" He did not know that a stoker, standing quietly a few feet behind him, heard his words.

After several weeks, the workman appeared in church. Making himself known after the service, he reminded the preacher of the incident at the factory and said: "Every time I have opened the furnace since then, I have thought of your words. I came tonight to take Jesus as my Lord and Savior. I don't want to find out what hell is like!"⁵

And notice that Jesus says about hell in v.42. This punishment will be so great that "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."⁶ These words describe despair and rage. The lawless will weep in despair & sorrow, for there is no end to it. They will be gnashing their teeth in anger. Who

⁴ The word translated "end" is *sunteleia*, which means "closing time." It denotes the joining of two ages, the closing of one age leading on to the beginning of the next [Phillips].

⁵ *Pulpit Helps*, March 2005, p.32.

⁶ See also Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28.

will they be angry with? Many will be angry at God, even though as we shall see, He is perfectly just in sending them to a devil's hell. Or perhaps they will also be gnashing their teeth in anger at every so-called friend or church hypocrite who led them down the wrong path to a devil's hell. In most cases they should be angry at themselves. They will have all eternity to think of every opportunity they had to trust in Christ as Savior, and they let the opportunity pass by.

Is God just in condemning people to hell? Judge for yourself. We have already seen one description of such people in v.42. All who are lawless will be assigned to hell. We have little problem understanding why lawless criminals are condemned to hell. Yes, unrepentant murderers, rapists, & robbers will be there. Hitler will be there. But they are not the only lawless ones. If you do not submit to the Lordship of Christ over your life, that is your destiny. Further, such people are described as those who "offend." This refers to those who cause others to stumble. There are quite a few hypocrites on the membership rolls of churches who cause many people to stumble into hell by their inconsistent life. Friend, if you're not going to *live* like a Christian, it's better than you not *profess* to be a Christian. If you're going to habitually lie, cheat, steal, cuss, get drunk, commit immorality, and so forth, you ought to ask that your name be removed from your church roll until such time as you to repent. Don't be the one who causes someone else to wind up in hell. Can you think of any fire that would be hotter than for a man in hell to hear the voice of his son saying, "Dad, I followed you down here"? This is a solemn thing. [McGee on Rev. 20]. Furthermore, it is necessary to remove such people. In the parable the tares are poisonous. Naturalists tell us that the inner coats of dandelion often harbor fungus growths and that the seeds, if eaten, can cause dizziness, vomiting, and even death. God must in due time remove the tares. If God did not separate out unrepentant sinners, heaven would not be a perfect place. Rev. 21:27 says regarding heaven, "But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." (cf. Rev. 21:8; 22:15).

What does this solemn truth mean for us? First, you should not let another day go by until you know for sure that you are going to heaven instead of hell. Do you know for sure that you are "wheat" instead of a "tare?" Have you just been a Christian outwardly, instead of inwardly? A few years ago the Barna Research Group found that just 1/2 of 1 percent of U.S. adults said they expect to go to hell when they die, while 64 percent predicted they will end up in heaven. I'm afraid that a lot of people are deceiving themselves! Second, this parable calls upon us to rescue the perishing. If we were walking by a house in the neighborhood and heard screams for help, then looked up and saw flames, and a child at the window, wouldn't you do what you could to rescue that child? Well Jesus Christ Himself says that there is a burning hell. He spoke more about Hell than He did about Heaven. I don't like hearing about hell. But I believe Him, for He worked miracles like no other man. He rose from the grave. He has impacted this world more than any other man. And the Church needs to get back to being a rescue mission for the lost. We've become entertainers instead of evangelists.

Why should you get involved in reaching the lost, and supporting the missionary cause of Christ? Well this parable also teaches that:

B. The Righteous will be Rewarded – Jesus said in v.43, "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." The Kingdom that is present but hidden from the world will yet be manifested in glory. I believe that Jesus is referring to the prophecy of Dan. 12:3: "They that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament...." Right now the world does not recognize us, just as they did not recognize the true identity of Jesus. But the day is coming when we shall shine somewhat like Christ did on the mount of transfiguration.

And who is it that will be rewarded with such splendor? Well that same prophecy in Daniel says it is “they that turn many to righteousness.” Based on Hebrew parallelism, these are the ones who are wise, and who will shine with God’s glory. In fact, Prov. 11:30 says, “...he who wins souls is wise.” Is there anyone you can name who is going to heaven because of your witness, and your life? Oh, let us work ‘til Jesus comes. Let us rescue the perishing, and care for the dying. The time of Christ’s return is drawing nigh. The opportunity to win people to Christ may be over soon. A wonderful reward is awaiting those who labor, and turn others to God.

C. The Kingdom of God Will Be Established on Earth – In v.43 Jesus said, “Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” No more shall Satan rule. No more shall evil dictators rule. No more shall injustice reign. For Jesus shall reign on the earth as King of kings, and Lord of lords! Praise the Lord! Even so, come Lord Jesus!

Conclusion: I want to conclude this message the way Jesus did. He said in the last of v.43, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” Christ solemnly bids us to heed the message of this parable. What Jesus says here is solemn truth with grave consequences. You had better give heed to these words of Jesus.

Sources: Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Vol. 3, (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1971); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); John Philips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, reprint, Christian Publishing Co.; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).