



“WEEDS” - Matthew 13:24-30

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at JF Believers Church

in Menomonie, Wisconsin

on June 26th, 2016

Matthew 13:24-25 *Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; "but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his*

way. "But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. "So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' "He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' "But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. 'Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

Jesus continues now in what we know as the Parables of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God which exists not just in some far away nebulous date, but is a reality today, and is a place in which many of us presently live. Christ often spoke in parables, so that those who truly were seeking and *are* seeking His truth and desire to live the disciplined life will hear and understand. However, those who live out on the fringes or even apart from the kingdom life altogether will gather nothing from such an account and will leave with what they desire from such a story, which is essentially *nothing*.

In the movies we so often see presented a scenario where the hero retreats to the sanctuary of some random church where the demonic forces that pursue him are either unwilling to enter out of fear, or at least unable to do evil and harm within its hallowed walls. The idea is presented that within these ‘holy walls’ of the church building, Satan is powerless to exercise his evil powers and those who reside inside are safe from the activities of the ‘dark side.’ Yet scripture paints a very different picture, one where in fact Satan does some of his best work from the pews of the local church, most often because the believers that reside there are ignorant to his ways, and self-righteous pride and mis-applied love blinds us to his methods.

This account that Jesus shares herein can be in itself a troubling picture for many of us. We want to believe that the church is pure and the community in which we live out our lives is of one mind and spirit. But Jesus is telling us quite factually that it is not! Certainly we desire for such a place of safety and long for the day in which we can let down our guard and expressly trust all those around us. A place where those who reside live in unity and a common heart. But such a place does not exist on this side of the final harvest, despite any and all attempts to pretend otherwise. And that being the case, one must wonder why the religious right is so rabid in their politics...a nearly militaristic involvement in an attempt to create on this earth what the Bible says will not exist until Christ is on the throne.

If you have attended this church for any amount of time, you know that this picture is something in which I have never flinched and never deviated. I have always preached a reality kingdom in which Satan “*prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*” That means Satan goes to church on Sundays and he is here amongst us this morning. That fact is hard for many of us to accept, and for many of us it is something in which we consciously choose to ignore. The reality is that the spiritual warfare that is waged around us daily is intense and seldom do we truly appreciate that fact. Being part of a Christian community is often seen as a retreat into the bunker of spiritual safety, when in fact it is possibly the most dangerous place you can be as a Christian. It is not the “safe room” of hallowed ground, but rather a battlefield where there are great victories, tragic losses, and intense trials. The fact is, the greatest personal pains I have ever experienced in this life have unquestionably come from people who have graced these pews and once called me brother.

We within the faith are at war. We cannot sit out this struggle and still say we love God and country...or in this case “kingdom.” Such participation is mandatory and compulsory if you are His child. In an effort to try to avoid this very real dynamic we have invented the home church movement, the congregational church government, and the Sunday only participatory attendance church. Long gone is the church community, the fellowship of the saints and the active service of the body. Archaic are the principles of submission, authority, and relational living. Adherence to such timeless biblical ideals garnish only labels of “fundamental” and “cultic.” After all, those things just get one in trouble! The close quarters, the inevitable personal life transparency, the time sucking monster of priorities and service...all are reasons enough to stay out of the fray or at least to keep your head down when the shooting starts! We want peace and peace at any cost even if it is just a “matrix” illusion!

The reality is, there will always be those who reject Christ and His teachings or at least aspects of such which effectively renders the practical manifest of his truth dysfunctional. This, I believe, we can all agree upon. But what is baffling and incredulous to many of us is the fact that these same disbelieving folks still so often hang around the church in some degree. Such a position is not to give or to participate, but rather to receive and to glean from the fruit and love overflow of those therein that are the “Real McCoy.” Therefore in any loving and dynamic church there are the evitable groupies who attend but fail to participate. They may even give monetarily but reject overt participation and active commitment for it gets in the way of their personal agenda and their long term plans. They are here for awhile until something better comes along...a potential husband, and hot female, a cash heavy career, a sheriff badge in some other church elsewhere.

I’m not referring to visitors or guests or the inquisitive seeker. This message is not for you. I am speaking of the one for which the months have turned into years and even now they remain warming a pew on Sundays and failing to find any real commitment to a community of believers beyond church attendance and occasional fellowship groups attendance. These are *customers* and they all eventually depart for perceived greener pastures, because they are not interested really in anything called ‘body-life’ or sacrifice because they fail to grasp the sacrifice that Christ made for them on the cross. Which is the gospel and they do not know it personally. They are here to “get” and when they eventually see the handwriting on the wall that such is not forthcoming, they move on. They want good news, giving hands, and praising lips from those they attend church with! And if and when the church is unable to support them in a personal life pursuit, they will quickly toss their “brothers and sisters” under the bus through whispers, innuendo and social media. These are the tares of Matthew 13. The “weeds” of a field of crops, often indistinguishable from the real thing without a great deal of time and close scrutiny. They are not “out there” someplace in the realm of the pagan world, but they are *in here*. They are here amongst the field of wheat...and for so long they can look very much like the real thing.

Such a revelation can garner some paranoia and active judgment of those around us. The ‘call to arms’ to protect the church for Jesus, as if somehow the church will not survive if not for us with our capes and our marvel comics super-powers! Yet it was Jesus Himself that said over 2000 years ago that even the very “gates of hell” would not prevail against His church. While He gives many warnings of corruption, apostasy, and falsehood amongst the kingdom churches, He makes it abundantly clear that despite all, **HIS** church will never fail and never be conquered. **HIS** church. Not *our* church, but **HIS**! He is the sower in the story! He is the owner and manager of the field! So while it is our ever great tendency to want to get in the middle of things and do some serious weed ripping and ‘sin-sniffing’, the master gives

implicit directions to not attempt it. His concern is not for the weeds, but for the crop near by that can inadvertently be damaged in the violence.

Now make no mistake...this passage is not prohibiting church discipline, body correction, or the watchful eye and warning for wolves. Paul himself in Acts 20 warned the church leadership to be careful! Verses 28-30 says *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.”* So it would be a mistake to hear the words of Christ herein as a call to spiritual passivism or a fatalistic resignation within the ranks of the church body. Jesus is not advocating a “c’est la vie” cavalier attitude, but rather a realization that the church belongs to Christ who sees all, knows all, and is aware of past, present, and future.

And further, we see that there is indeed a day of judgment and condemnation against these ‘weeds’, but not until the harvest. They will, according to this account, be *“gathered together in bundles and burned.”* That does not mean they all will survive in their present form and in their present location until our Lord’s second coming. Often they eventually implode but sadly like spiritual terrorists they do so in a group of innocent bystanders, like the modern suicide bombers on the streets and sidewalks of places like Paris and Tel Aviv, spiritually “killing” those around them that unwittingly saw them as ‘just another individual on the street.’ But often such a manifest as this takes time. I have seen it literally take years! Situations where someone carries on amongst us, doing religious things and talking the talk, only to finally one day manifest the truth as to who and what they are, and what their agenda really is.

In the Charles Bronson movie “Telefon” there were individuals planted as sleeper agents throughout America where they could blend into society and appear to be just ‘joe-schmo’ down the street...average people in average jobs in average towns. They were so well placed and well established that even *they* did not know they were sleeper agents! Much like the weeds in the wheat field of the church. For it seems to me that most of these folks fail to even realize that they *are* a demonic sleeper agent, which means therefore that like Judas, they never realized that they were not truly one of God’s kids until that phone call would come calling them into action. John 16:3-4 says *“...the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.”*

I believe most go on to *never* know the truth, believing the entire time that they are the patriot...that they are the loyalist! Up until the time in which they are transformed into agents of destruction, they looked every bit like everyone else...with neighbors and families and jobs. This is the stuff that keeps a pastor up at night...the very real fear that many who believe themselves to be born again and faithful, have never really surrendered to Christ, and never given their lives to Him to control and guide. They are merely ‘sleeper agents’ unwittingly waiting to be greatly used by Satan in the harm to his church.

Thankfully, not all of these suicide bombers make it to their destination. We are in no way perfect on this account...though God has been very gracious to often give the leadership here the spiritual gift of discernment which has saved us again and again. Situations where we just knew something was wrong despite all outward appearances, so power and position was not given to individuals only for us to eventually discover why. Thank God! But the fact is, such weeds will always be amongst us. The names and faces will change, but the roles will not. We’ll all be surprised and saddened, but time will march on and so will we. Because the truth is, each of us are truthfully only what we are at the harvest. That may come corporately at the rapture of the church, or that may come individually at the finish line of each of our lives, but what happens in the middle matters very little if we do not finish well!

Paul speaks of such in 2 Timothy 4:6-8 saying *“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”*

So the warning that Christ is giving us is that Satan will spare no cost when it comes to his attempts to undermine the kingdom of God and to eventually bring you to your demise. He not only will snatch the seed away from the soil before it finds root...he not only will attempt to strangle the life out of you through the entanglements of this life and the worldliness that is found herein...he not only will attempt to break you through the trials and persecution, ...but he will go so far as to allow seeds of corruption to find root and grow along side of you in attempt to keep you from ever producing fruit for Christ...ever truly knowing the harvest of God.

This warning is so important to us who are faithful! We need to realize that the wheat and the weeds will always be growing side by side and both look very much like the real thing. That there will never be a perfect and pure manifest of God's kingdom until after the second coming and the full and bodily manifest of Christ reigning over all. If we implicitly realize such, we are not therefore surprised when one day someone in the body here inexplicably takes a hard right turn and does something that is so out of character, and so obviously damnable. We are pained and our hearts bleed but we should not be surprised. Throughout scripture we are warned that there will be those who will fail to finish well. Those who begin the race and will not finish. Their lusts and their pride will lead them to idolatry and what they will want or even want to be will supersede what God wants and has planned for them.

If we seldom can tell that they are weeds by their appearance, and if often they themselves do not know they are weeds, what is to be done to protect ourselves? Remembering firstly that the church is God's and not our own, there are a couple of lines of defense. One, is to regularly use a spiritual mirror. I have mentioned before that on my way home from the church there is a lama that lives in a field with a bunch of cows. Only one lama, and therefore there is no other lama there to tell him he IS a lama. So I have often wondered if that lama thinks he is a cow. I mean, he *lives* with a bunch of cows and only *sees* other cows, so without a mirror he has no idea that he actually is a lama. But if he had mirror, would he stop and think "*wait a minute...*" And what if the cows could communicate to him and he actually cared what they thought? Would he ask them "hey guys, am I a cow?" Would that we would seek out truthful brothers and sisters who we would honestly ask "brother...sister...*what do you see in me?*" And what if we were to regularly use a spiritual mirror where we would look at our reflection in the light of scripture and ask "what do I see in myself?" Is there jealousy? Is there bitterness and anger? Is there a desire to be and to have that supersedes what our lives say about ourselves and what others say about us? 2Corinthians 13:5 says "*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless indeed you are disqualified.*"

Secondly, we must realize that like terrorism in this world, spiritual terrorism is here to stay. There will always be the spiritual suicide bombers and they will always attempt to do maximum damage. This is why these folks never seem to just go away, but always attempt to reach out to the young, the weak, the innocent, and try to take them out as well. It is a darkly humorous thing to watch these folks not only attempt to plant seeds of corruption *within* the walls of the church, but they invariably go outside and dig up every disgruntled individual that has ever departed the church and saddle up beside them and instead of rebuking them for their ungodliness they encourage them in their rebellion. This action is so common that is now a trademark expectation. They will invariably and overtly do the things that they once preached against...they will act in ways that they at one time condemned others for doing.

Knowing these attributes and warning signs are crucial to minimizing their success. Knowing when to back up...when to step away is crucial. This does not mean we quit loving them. Jesus no doubt continued to love Judas, but he did not let him move forward unhindered where he could exercise maximum damage. In fact, he "outed" him at the dinner table in front of the others! So learn the early signs of such spiritual suicide bombers and beware. Matthew 23:42 warns us... "*know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.*" And guard your hearts. People that you love will fail and go back. People that you care about will melt down and hurt you. We must continue to love them, yet remembering always that our *first* love must be to Christ and we are ultimately here for Him, not for the other members of our club.

1Peter 4:17 "*For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God...*"