

How Long Must We Put Up With This Sinful World?

Intro: Watching the nightly news is usually not a particularly pleasant experience. On the one hand, it helps us keep up with what's going on in the world; but on the other hand, it probably makes wish we didn't know what was going on in the world.

To be uninformed about what's going on in the world is to be almost oblivious to the challenges that lie before us in spreading the gospel. To be informed is to at times be absolutely amazed at the depth of evil to which human beings can go. Maybe the thought has come to your mind, "Why does the Lord allow this evil to go on?! Why doesn't He just bring this sinful world to an end once and for all!?"

People in Jesus' day must have asked those questions. They believed that whenever the Christ appeared, he would bring evil to a hasty and decisive end, and that there would be victory for faithful.

And in Jesus' day, there was in fact an impassioned army of soldiers just waiting for such a leader to come along. They were called Zealots; and they got that name because they were passionate about overthrowing the dominion of the evil Roman government and were ready to raise their swords against them the moment their leader appeared.

It was important for Jesus to correct these mistaken notions about the kingdom and to help his disciples overcome the impatience that they would inevitably feel. To that end he told his disciples a parable that can also help us when we see all the evil around us in this world (Mt. 13).

The parable of the tares

He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away.

A tare is a noxious weed or grass that has in its early stages of growth a similar appearance to wheat or rye. Its seed was toxic and would corrupt any harvest, producing a bitter taste and nausea to those who consumed it.

But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!'

Though this practice would not have been common, sowing weeds in a cultivated field was a violation of Roman law indicating that the practice was possible and one way to get revenge against an enemy.

*And the slaves *said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ But he *said, ‘No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them.*

It might have made sense to remove the weeds quickly in order that they might not compete with the healthy plants; but since the roots of the two were so intertwined, removing the one would bring damage to the other. Thus, the master urges them to wait until the time of harvest. *‘Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.”’ (Matthew 13:24-30)*

In time a separation would occur; but for the time being, the only thing the servants could do was to patiently wait for harvest.

What is the meaning and purpose of the parable?

This parable had an important purpose in the teaching of Jesus. Most people in the first century believed that the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom would bring a cataclysmic disruption of society.

The people who lived at Qumran had isolated themselves from the rest of world and awaited the coming of a great battle between the “sons of light” and the “sons of darkness.”

Apparently most Jews including the disciples thought the Messiah’s coming would inaugurate a hasty defeat of the forces of evil as they knew them. The Roman government would be overthrown; the sovereignty of Israel restored and peace and security would be the result.

Thus, with these lingering misconceptions the disciples found it difficult to comprehend the message of Jesus' parable.

Then He left the multitudes, and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.”

Therefore Jesus gave them an explanation of the meaning of the parable.

And He answered and said, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. Therefore just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (Matthew 13:36-43)

Most of us have been conditioned by familiarity with Jesus’ teaching to not immediately perceive how radical that teaching would seem to first-century Jews. Jesus’ parable gives us several insights into His kingdom.

Some important lessons for us!

An important lesson about God's methods

The parable of the tares is an extension of the parable of the sower. It too reveals that the kingdom of heaven is not for everybody, but for people with certain kind of attitude. Jesus seeks to "sow" the world with righteous people. His goal as the Christ was to bring an increase to the kingdom of God by persuading people to obey God. His kingdom is not about political coercion of the wicked by law or force, but by proclamation of the message of God's love, bringing about repentance and voluntary submission to the Lord.

An important lesson about God's vision.

When Jesus sees the world, He sees only two kinds of people, "sons of the kingdom" and "sons of the evil one." The "sons of the kingdom" are not just the physical Jews, but those who are spiritually submissive to Jesus Christ. They are those who have received the forgiveness of God and lived out that forgiveness in obedience to God (thus, they are called "the righteous.")

The "tares" are those who resist Jesus' rule, who give offense and do iniquity. They are not two groups but one. When one chooses to defy God's law (do iniquity), he likewise is a cause of harm to the faith of others, an occasion to cause them to stumble. Which are we?

An important lesson about God's purpose

The parable of the sower tells us how the kingdom begins; the parable of the tares how it develops and ends. It reveals that the kingdom of God would not immediately resolve the problem of sin and evil does nor the suffering they bring on the world.

Instead it reveals that the conflict between the sons of light and the sons of darkness would continue through the ages. The righteous and the wicked would have to live together for a time in order to make fully manifest who the righteous really are and who the wicked really are and only then would the end come when evil men would be judged and the righteous delivered.

No matter how difficult, we must endure a world where evil and good exist side by side. It might be tempting to withdraw or isolate ourselves. It might be tempting to bury our heads in the sand and pretend that the world is not as evil as it is. But as discouraging as that might be there is a blessing in understanding the reason for God's delay.

An important lesson about God's patience

This parable gives us insight into the love of God for His people and the patience it produces. As bad as evil men are, He can wait to punish them because He does not want to destroy the righteous. He patiently endures the vexation of the wicked because He seeks the full development of righteousness in us!

Of course, God's endurance of the evil is not permission for the church to neglect the attempted restoration of the erring or the judgment of disciples who continue in disobedience. Some have erroneously interpreted Mt 13 to contradict Mt. 18 and other NT texts that command the church to correct the erring rather than tolerate them.

An important lesson about God's justice

There will be a day of reckoning, a consummating day of judgment in which all men will be recompensed according to their deeds.

The wicked will be in "hell"

And their fate is portrayed in fearful terms: "cast into the furnace of fire." Jesus appropriated common Jewish conceptions of eternal punishment. A furnace of fire would suggest being engulfed in pain and destruction.

There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Weeping suggests loud crying out.

Gnashing of teeth suggests painful experiences.

The righteous will inherit the eternal kingdom of the Father.

"The righteous will shine as the sun in the kingdom of the Father."

Here Jesus appropriates the language of Daniel's "end time" vision. Those who have been obedient to God will continue the glorious life they have lived in obedience to God on earth, but now without any struggles against evil, only the approval of the Father who will reign over them forever.

Conclusion: Now many years later we can see that the kingdom of God has unfolded just as Jesus indicated in this parable. Through His death He opened up a way for sinners to be righteous and on the basis of His sacrifice, He continues to sow the righteous in the world while the devil sows tares.

There will be times when we are weary of the conflict, tired of the evil we see around us. But we will not have to put up with this sinful world forever. "There is a great day coming when the saint and the sinner shall be parted right and left." Until that time, we must be patient and we must make sure that we are the "good seed" that the angels of God shall reap at the last day. Are we? Are you?