

# Why is God's Kingdom Surrounded by Sin?

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Date: 29 September 2024

Preacher: Donald Smith

[ 0 : 0 0 ] This is God's Word. Please do keep that passage open in front of you. Let us ask God for help with it. Let us pray. Almighty God and most merciful Father, we humbly submit ourselves now to your Word, asking from the bottom of our hearts that this seed of your Word now sown among us may take such deep roots that neither the burning heat of persecution would cause it to wither nor the thorny cares of this life choke it, but that as good seed in good ground, it may bring forth 30, 60 or 100 fold as your heavenly wisdom has appointed. Amen.

I wonder if the name Mohammed Al-Fayed means anything to you. Three weeks ago, that probably would have just been a really obscure answer to a difficult pub quiz question.

But if you have even glanced at the news over the last fortnight, that name will now mean something to you. He was the owner of Harrods, the luxury goods store in central London.

Now, no trial has been held, has it? But the evidence seems pretty overwhelming. This appears to have been a wicked man who abused his position of power to cause lifelong suffering to innocent victims.

He died in August last year. He will never face the courts of this country. Indeed, if you go through your news feeds, you will find countless stories, won't you, of wickedness and injustice in this world.

[ 2 : 0 6 ] There was another story this week of a man in Japan who had been on death row for 46 years, awaiting his execution, which could have been announced at any moment, for a quadruple homicide he was just acquitted of last week.

Somebody murdered a family of four and lived life freely while an innocent man was imprisoned for almost half a century.

Elsewhere in the news just this week, there were stories of teenagers cruelly stabbed to death, pensioners defrauded of their life savings.

There was a mass shooting, wasn't there, in South Africa. Those are just some of the stories that have made it to the front pages of our news outlets this week.

But you do not have to dig deep, do you, to find countless, and I mean countless, other examples of the wicked seeming to prosper.

[ 3 : 1 8 ] We do not really need convinced, do we, that there is evil in this world. We see it everywhere, and we often see injustice too.

Robbers get rich, the powerful abuse their position, and never get held to account. The guilty live freely. That is the world we live in. And it is the world Christ's church is caught in the midst of.

One in seven Christians face persecution for their faith. Forty percent of believers in Asia are persecuted for believing in Jesus.

In 144 countries across the world, our brothers and sisters are deliberately targeted for their faith. In Nigeria alone, 50,000 Christians have been killed in the last 15 years.

We don't need convinced that there is evil at work in this world, and you don't have to look very far to see that same evil rising up against the church. And yet, so often there seems so little justice.

[ 4 : 36 ] And that might well leave us with some questions. Matthew has been presenting Jesus as God's great king through this gospel.

At the end of the book, Jesus, the risen Jesus, is going to stand before his disciples and say, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to God's great and gracious king. Surely, that would be a great place to live.

Surely, that will be a kingdom of peace and prosperity. And yet, look at the world we live in. Look at the wickedness around us.

And so, we might well ask, has God's kingdom come? Is God's king really reigning on his throne over everything?

[ 5 : 47 ] As Joe introduced last week, these kingdom parables of chapter 13 teach us something about the surprising nature of Christ's kingdom on earth.

We might well expect and certainly want peace and prosperity, victory over evil and justice for all. But that is not what we have, is it?

That is not the world we live in. That is not the world that the church is growing in. Well, this parable of the weeds in Matthew 13 was recorded for people who were looking at the headlines of their day and wondering those very thoughts.

Is this really what life in Christ's kingdom should look like? If Jesus reigns over all, why is there so much evil in the world? That is the question we're going to spend our time this evening unpacking as we go through this parable together.

We're going to unpack it in three points that you'll see there on your order of service that you'll have received as you came in the door. Before we go into those points, let me just very briefly remind you of what we saw last week when Joe introduced us to the purpose of the parables that we saw at the beginning of Matthew 13.

[ 7 : 13 ] We can often, can't we, think of parables as if they were sort of helpful illustrations, as if they made difficult points clearer. We saw last week, didn't we?

That is not why Jesus speaks in parables. Jesus speaks in parables to test people's hearts. Because without explanation, they really don't make much sense, do they?

We get the same thing again here with this parable, where for those who do not come to Jesus, they will be left dumbfounded. What does Jesus say in verse 24 to 30, if that's all you had?

The kingdom of God is like a man whose wheat field is subject to sneak attack by a weed planter, but he decides to wait until harvest time before dealing with any of it.

What? What? What's that supposed to mean? Now you might be joining the dots in your heads, but that's only because we've read Jesus' explanation, haven't we?

[ 8 : 23 ] If that was all we heard, we would all be left confused. But Jesus speaks in parables so that those who would hear him would come to him.

Come to Jesus. And that is what his disciples do again in verse 35. He speaks in parables, and then after that, the disciples come to Jesus and say, what was that all about?

Help us understand Lord Jesus. And then to those who come to him, Jesus makes clear the meaning of his words.

Come to Jesus. That is where we need to begin if we want to understand his word to us. If you want that unpacked more helpfully over the course of half an hour, go and listen to Joe's sermon last week.

But for the moment, we are just going to go with the disciples this evening who have come to Jesus that we might understand what Jesus says about his kingdom here in this parable.

[ 9 : 30 ] So why is the kingdom of God surrounded by evil? Why is the kingdom of God surrounded by sin? That is the question this parable addresses.

And as I mentioned, we get kind of three unfolding answers over the course of this parable that help us understand this apparent problem. And the first one of those answers, and our first point this evening, is that the devil is working.

Working. Jesus begins this parable by once more taking us into the world of agriculture. Kingdom of heaven, he says there in verse 24, is like a man who goes out into his field and scatters good seeds.

It is good seed that is scattered. It is all the ingredients of a successful, healthy crop. We're expecting good things. But while his men were sleeping, an enemy comes in and sows weeds amongst the wheat.

And for those who come to him, Jesus spells out clearly what is going on here in verse 37 and 38. The sower is the son of man.

[ 10 : 51 ] That is Jesus. The field, okay, the field is the whole world. It's a really important point for understanding this parable. The field is not the church, but the whole world.

The point of this parable is not to explain why there are wolves in the church, although that is true, but why there is sin in the world, even though Christ reigns over all. So the field is the world.

The seeds of wheat are the sons of the kingdom of heaven, the sons of heaven, Christ's kingdom, but there is an enemy. There is an enemy, and that enemy is the devil who is sowing his seeds, his weeds, the sons of his kingdom amongst the sons of Christ's kingdom.

So why is the kingdom of God surrounded by sin? Because there really is an enemy at work.

And that is important to remember when we wonder why the kingdom of heaven is not growing unopposed in this world. We might like to imagine that kingdom growth would kind of be like a football match where it's 11 against none, and you just spend 90 minutes kind of kicking the ball into an empty net constantly.

[ 12 : 13 ] That'd be really easy, wouldn't it? But that's not how football works. There is an opponent standing between you and your goal, doing what they can to stop you achieving your objective.

Well, so too with the kingdom of heaven. There is an enemy doing all he can to stop God's kingdom reach its objective, and he's not exactly in the business of playing fair.

All the language of the enemy in verse 25, it's sneaky and subversive. He creeps in while everyone is sleeping. Plants weeds amongst the weak. Even then, it is not just any old weeds.

You'll notice, if you have a little footnote there in your Bible, verse 25, the weed is probably a darnel, a wheat-like weeds. It would have started growing, and nothing would have seemed amiss.

All would have seemed well until all the roots were tangled. Enough growth had happened that there was no removing the weeds without uprooting the wheat too.

[ 13 : 27 ] We as Christians do not need to fear the devil. He has been disarmed by Christ, dealt a fatal blow through our Savior's death on the cross. He has no power over us.

We do not need to fear the devil, but we do need to be wise to his purposes. We saw last week as well, very briefly, didn't we, that back in verse 19, where the seed we sow will sometimes be snatched away by the devil.

Jesus wants his disciples to know there is an enemy to his kingdom's growth. If you want to understand why God's kingdom isn't marching unopposed to victory, why it isn't racking up countless goals as it kicks the ball into an empty net, remember that there is an enemy at work who will do all in his power to prevent kingdom growth from happening.

Do not fear him, but do not forget about him. Keep your guard. So why is the kingdom of God surrounded by evil?

Well, in part because the devil is working. That goes maybe some of the way, doesn't it, to answering our question? But not all the way. Because the response might well come, and perhaps should come, can't God just get rid of all the evil in this world?

[ 14 : 54 ] Why doesn't he just remove all the wickedness and sin and free this world from suffering? Why doesn't he do that now? Doesn't Jesus have authority over the devil?

Maybe you've asked yourself that very question. It's one of the most common objections, isn't it, to God's existence or to God's goodness. If there is a God, why is there so much suffering in the world?

There are some things that this side of eternity we will never quite be able to answer with complete understanding, but this parable does, I think, go some of the way to help us understand what Jesus is doing.

There is sin and wickedness in this world because the devil is working. And sin and wickedness remain in this world because the Son of Man is waiting.

Now, as I was kind of writing this sermon, I realized, having already put the points in the service sheet, that might make Jesus sound a bit idle, as if the devil's hard at work while Jesus has his feet up on the sofa. That is not the case at all.

[ 16 : 06 ] Please don't think, take that from this sermon, despite my slightly poorly worded points. The Son of Man is working, isn't he, in verse 24. He is sowing the seed, isn't he, but he is also waiting to bring in the harvest.

Just come with me to verse 27. The servants of the Master see what is going on in the field, all of a sudden full of weeds. And they're like, wait a minute.

What's happening out there? Jesus, we thought you sowed good seeds. Where have all these weeds come from? And to them, the onlooking workers, there is an obvious solution, isn't there?

Let's just go and get rid of the weeds. That's probably what we would do, wouldn't we? If there was sort of a lever you could pull that would eradicate all sin and suffering, how many of us would think twice before pulling it?

It's exactly what Jesus' servants are saying to him. Let us go and pull the lever. Let us dig up the weeds. Let's get rid of them. Let us get rid of them. Let us go and pull the lever.

[ 17 : 23 ] Let us go and pull the lever. Let us go but Jesus has a better idea. Jesus has a more merciful plan because Jesus has a more loving purpose.

Jesus in this parable shows us the world as a field of wheat and weeds that has grown together so that their roots are intertwined. To pull up the weeds is to pull up the wheat.

The point Jesus wants us to understand is that the moment he sends out his workers to root up the weeds he is bringing about the harvest. And that will be the end of growth for both kingdoms.

For the weeds and the wheat. Look what he says there in verse 29 and 30. He says, No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.

Let both grow together. Jesus in his wisdom and because of his love he waits.

[ 18 : 37 ] Remember those words that Alistair read from 2 Peter 3 earlier? It's a similar situation. Peter is writing to an audience who are wondering when the day of the Lord is going to come.

Why hasn't justice arrived yet? The apostle writes, The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness but is patient towards you not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance.

Remember that lever you could pull to bring an end to all evil and suffering? if Jesus had pulled that lever ten years ago how many of us in this room would not have been found in his kingdom?

If he had chosen at the turn of the millennium to deal with all sin and evil and bring about just judgment where would you have been left standing?

What if it had been 50 years ago? Many of us would have been found to be weeds or wouldn't have been at all. What if the Lord had not waited?

[ 20 : 03 ] How small would his kingdom have been if he brought about the harvest when Matthew was writing his gospel? But as Jesus waits yes sin and wickedness might seem to increase as the seeds of the devil are left to grow but so too does Christ's kingdom.

I thank God that in his mercy he did not bring an end to sin 10 years ago because he would have brought an end to me. Jesus longs for people to turn in repentance and find salvation in him.

He does not deal with sin and wickedness because there are still those who are yet to turn to him who will turn to him. He is waiting for them. perhaps he is waiting for you.

The kingdom of God is surrounded by sin because Jesus wants to save sinners and he is calling more and more to himself each and every day.

We might long for a sinless world and Jesus longs for that too but he also longs for sinners to find life in him. He will only call in the harvest when every one of his sheep have been found.

[ 21 : 37 ] Praise God for his longsuffering. We would have been so quick, wouldn't we, to pull that lever for our sake. Jesus waits so that many more might come to him.

I think it was Augustine who said the weeds of today might be the wheat of tomorrow. Jesus is in the business of saving sinners, of bringing life to the dead, of growing a kingdom that will span every corner of the earth, that will incorporate every tongue and tribe and nation.

And so the son of man waits, not because he does not care about suffering, but because he cares so much about people. And praise God for that because of his patience, you and I are wheat in his field.

And because of his patience, many more will be too. God's kingdom is surrounded by sin because the devil is working and the son of man is waiting.

But notice what we're saying there. Jesus is waiting. He is not turning a blind eye to sin and lawlessness.

[ 22 : 58 ] He is waiting so the kingdom will grow to its full potential, but one day he will bring justice. Our third point this evening, judgment is coming.

The problem of evil is still a problem and it is one that God will deal with. Perhaps you have suffered evil in your life that you are crying out for justice for.

It will come. Verse 40, Jesus says, just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.

The son of man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all lawbreakers and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

They are solemn words, aren't they? But they are God's good words and we need to hear them clearly. This is an extremely divisive parable.

[ 24 : 09 ] There is no middle ground, is there? There are only two categories. There's the wheat, that's the people who belong to Jesus, and there are the weeds, that's the people who belong to the devil.

And those who are sons of the devil's kingdom, he says, will eventually be thrown into the fire, to a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

God waits so that his kingdom would grow, but for those who are found outside of God's kingdom on that last day, he will bring justice upon them.

Maybe this evening you need to hear the warning in these verses. He said plainly earlier in his gospel, didn't he? You are either with Jesus or against Jesus.

This parable makes that clear as can be. There is nothing more serious than whose side you will be found on.

[ 25 : 22 ] God's sin. There really is hell, and it really is awful. And if your trust is not in Jesus, you will go there.

will be found in your love. These are the words of a gentle and lowly and compassionate saviour who once desperately wants you to be found in his kingdom on that day.

But if you reject him, this is where you will be found. if you are holding him at arm's length, you need to invite him into your life.

You need to. And he wants you to. He wants to rescue you. He wants to save you. That is why he is waiting. Maybe you need to hear this as a warning.

But this parable is primarily here, in fact, I think, as an encouragement to the church. Where does Jesus end this parable?

[ 26 : 41 ] Not with the weeping and gnashing of teeth, but in verse 43, then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father.

The kingdom of God is surrounded by sin, but it will not always be so. An end to all sin and lawlessness is coming.

We must suffer and struggle for a while as we wait for God's kingdom to grow. and grow and grow. Matthew's original audience would have known that far better than we do.

A tiny kingdom for them, a minuscule church surrounded by the seemingly immeasurable might of the Roman Empire. God's will be God's will be to the kingdom of the world.

But one day it will reach its fullness. And then all causes of sin and lawlessness will be gotten rid of for eternity.

[ 27 : 48 ] And you will shine like the sun in the kingdom of your father. God's will one day, although it might not be this day, you will dwell in eternal peace with your God and with all his people.

The harvest will be bountiful and you will share in that glory with many brothers and sisters who will never again know the stain of sin, who will never again fail or fall, but will only and forever live with God and live for God.

That is our future. It might not be our presence, but we endure today. We endure so that as many as possible can repent and join us in looking forward with great hope to that day.

So why is the kingdom of God surrounded by sin? because the devil is working, because the Son of Man is waiting. But know that the kingdom of God will not always be surrounded by the weeds of this world.

There is a day of harvest coming when the world will be made new, all evil will come to an end and we will shine like the sun forevermore.

[ 29 : 20 ] let us pray. Let us pray. Father, we mourn the evil and wickedness we see in this world. world. But Father, we praise you for your long suffering, for your patience, that many might come to know you and love you.

We thank you and praise you for your wisdom, for your mercy, for your grace, that you have waited, and long to live for your love.

And that many more might too. Father, help us to trust in you each and every day, knowing your ways are not our ways, nor are your thoughts our thoughts, but you alone are full of grace and truth.

faith. And so we thank you and praise you, and long to live for you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.