

TEXT:¹

So off-the-bat, ya notice in **v.24** we're told that Jesus is here telling another parable, meaning another parable AFTER the *Parable of the Sower*, which you recall, we looked at 2 weeks ago/if ya missed that, you can get BOTH the message transcript AND audio online. But telling another parable after that one. And that's important to note. BECAUSE, you recall, not only is Jesus telling these parables to people who'd long-assumed that His arrival would bring swift cleansing to the world, BUT in having just given the *Parable of the Sower*, and subsequently shown how surprising, indiscriminate/even lavishly good and present God now is; Jesus no doubt left folks/maybe YOU thinking, "*Man that's great!...So why then is there still so much evil/frustration in the world.*" Like, if as Jesus has been saying in His sermons to this point, "*The kingdom of God is here, because I the King am here,*" why ISN'T the world/our lives more cleaned up? ***Ever wondered that?***...THAT'S the context INTO which Jesus tells this parable here, which you see involves 3 characters: A farmer, who sows good seed or wheat...An enemy, who sows a counter-crop of weeds into the farmer's field/literally zizania, which was a kind of degenerate FORM of wheat, that LOOKED just like wheat/would even divert nutrients away FROM the wheat, BUT when it came to maturity, would just be stalk...So you got a farmer sowing good seed; this enemy coming in sometime between planting and harvest and sowing bad seed; and THEN these "*servants*" /farmhands, who seeing the bad seed growing up alongside the good, offer to do what, honestly, I think any respectable person would, which is: offer to rip out the weeds/take care of the problem right? See, these servants/they represent, what I'd say is the very common-sense way we TYPICALLY respond to problems, pain, injustice, or just inconvenience: See something, say something. Say something, do something right? AND I might add, ASSUME that IN doing something, we're doing God's work/doing the thing the "*farmer,*" who Jesus tells us down in **v.37** represents Him as God - the thing HE would WANT us to do! Of course God wants us to step-in or protest, speak-out or fight back, show solidarity with and smooth things out right?/Of course!...Only problem: The farmer...says "*No!*" Not only tells em to leave the division of wheat and weed to His "reapers" for later, BUT actually tells em: let the crops grow together/be patient/literally long-suffering, LEST in their rooting up of the weeds, he says, they end up rooting out the wheat too. In other words/listen: The farmer is saying that, because HE'S exercising long-suffering patience as the means for dealing with this injustice, the well-intentioned good deeds of the servants are actually...a threat to the good they're trying to preserve.² Talk about ***upside down.*** That's the parable! ***Any questions?***

Of course! And as ya see down in **v.36** the Disciples had questions too. Cuz it sure seems like Jesus is saying that the way we're to interact with pain, suffering, evil or just frustration...is ta NOT to right? Cuz obviously Jesus is talking about more just farming practices here. If you look back in **v.24** where He introduces the parable and then down in **vv.36-43** where He explains it, you see the whole thing's an analogy for, as He says, "*the Kingdom of heaven*" /in other words, the way LIFE actually works. THIS is Jesus' understanding of ***real reality!*** And IN "real reality"

¹ A large portion of this message adapted from various thoughts and insights provided by Tim Keller in: "The Wheat and the Weeds; On Reality - The Parables of Jesus 1992 - August 9, 1992 - Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013). + "5. The Threat of Religious Help (Parables #2)", April 21, 2021 - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000518029895>

² Insight from "5. The Threat of Religious Help (Parables #2)", Apr. 21, 2021 - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000518029895>

a couple things are going on: **First**, HE/“*the Son of Man*,” is doing GOOD things in the world/as He says “*sowing good seed in the field*,” which He tells us means that He’s all-the-time bringing back into relationship with Him/healing us of our brokenness, forgiving our sin, restoring us to Himself/making us as He says, “*sons of the Kingdom*.” THIS is what Jesus is up to/this is the big story of which you and I are a part. Ya know, statistics say that in A.D. 100/so approximately 70 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection there were 360 non-Christians for every one Christian. TODAY that ratio is less than 7 to 1...Take Indonesia: THERE, the number of Christians has grown from 1.3 million to 11 million in only 40 years...In Nepal, up until 1960, if you were a professing Christian, you weren’t officially allowed to live in-country. TODAY, there’s a church in EVERY one of the country’s 75 districts/totaling over half-a-million Christians nation-wide...In Iran, which is considered one of the greatest, global persecutors OF Christians, about 500 Muslims are coming to faith in Christ...EVERY month!...The list goes-on-and-on, BECAUSE Jesus IS and HAS BEEN “*sowing good seed into the world*.”

But Jesus tells us the **Second** thing that’s going on is, just because you and I/our friends, neighbors, co-workers hopefully, enter back into relationship with Christ; that doesn’t mean evil and injustice gets immediately eradicated right? Not only cuz you and I’ll continue to struggle with sin, but in the meantime there’s an ENEMY/“*the devil*” Jesus calls Him, doing whatever He can to sow falsehood/deception/“*zanzia*,” to keep people from aligning WITH Jesus. And Jesus says, that’s gonna be the case until “*the end of the age*”/until He returns and like the farmer and reapers separate the wheat from the weeds, He separates those who are His followers from those who simply LOOKED like His followers. In the meantime though, He’s long-suffering/even forgiving the injustice that’s taking place. And I say “forgiving” because the Greek root word used there in the phrase “*let both grow together*” literally translates “permit or suffer.” It’s the same word used in the Lord’s Prayer when Jesus talks about forgiving our trespasses...In other words, Jesus’ WHOLE POINT with this parable is to tell us that: “**real reality**” is an existence in which ONE DAY, ALL wrongs will ABSOLUTELY be righted. But TODAY, what prevails is NOT eradicating every wrong, but FORGIVING em! That’s the parable!

IMPLICATIONS:

So 4 really important implications FROM this parable/write these down: **First, belief in a cosmic enemy/the Devil, is what explains the presence of evil, injustice, and frustration in the world!** The philosopher Milton Steinberg once said that, “*the Christian has to account for what looks like unjust suffering in the world. But the atheist/the person who thinks talk of God and devils is silliness - THAT person, he said, has to account for everything else.*” And of course what he’s saying is: the burden of proof for what’s wrong in the world is infinitely greater WHEN the presence of a cosmic enemy is removed. Cuz think about it: If the brokenness around us were simply a function of needing more resources or education, better policies, political systems or structures - don’t you think we would’ve solved it by now? Like, as a species, we’ve never lived in a more materially-prosperous, technologically-advanced, medically-forward, educationally-literate world than we do today. And YET, by all accounts evil/brokenness not only lives, it thrives...Think about this: Back in 1991 a survey by the International Social Survey Programme found that 45.4% of Americans believed in the devil. That was compared to 20.4 %

of Italians, 12.5% of Russians, 9.5% of/at the time West Germans, and 3.6% of East Germans. What those numbers showed was that it's statistically significant that belief in the devil was lowest in those countries/Russia and Germany - that suffered, during the 20th century, most acutely from forms of evil that/without exaggerating HAVE to be considered demonic. In other words, those who were LESS likely to believe in the reality of demonic evil, were ironically more susceptible to it in things like charismatic but evil leadership... Perhaps that's why there's that great line from the movie *The Usual Suspects*, when the character Keyser Soze says at the end, "*The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world that he didn't exist.*" I mean if nothing else, JESUS clearly, as we see here, believed in the devil. And He was the most enlightened, woke, progressive thinker to've ever lived.

Second, your good intentions/good deeds might actually make thing worse when it comes to dealing with the evil, injustice and frustration around us! One of the truly *upside down* things in this parable is the fact that Jesus is VERY clear that when we go about trying to "rip up" rather than patiently endure and forgive suffering, we can actually threaten what's good/"*the wheat*" if you will!... Now, let's be clear: That is NOT Jesus saying that we shouldn't acknowledge or resist evil. Jesus Himself understood evil better than anyone. It got Him hung on a Cross. Not to mention, both He and later the Apostle Paul in **Romans 13** acknowledge that the REASON God gave governments to the world, is precisely to keep evil in check by punishing it. What Jesus IS saying is: While it's ok to point out/even resist evil, you gotta understand: our resistance, not matter how passionate, strategic or compelling it is, won't ultimately SOLVE evil/ WON'T ultimately fix the human heart from which all evil comes!... AND in the meantime, it may end up making things worse. Cuz as I heard one person say, "*just think about all the evil done today in the name of good/all the INjustice done in the name of justice/IMmorality done in the name of MORality.*"³ The canceling for example, DONE in the name of justice, but which so often just ends up deepening divisions? Cuz be honest, if we truly applied the logic of today's cancel-culture, which you know says that the real problems in the world are solved by removing some person or people out there; don't you'd have to admit: We're ALL those people! To use Jesus' analogy; the evil that resides in "*the field*"/the world...that's the same evil that resides in our hearts. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who witnessed some of the worst evil in history/that of being imprisoned in a Russian gulag wrote, "*If only there were evil people somewhere, insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them...*" But there's not! Because as he said, "*the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who's willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?*" Our good intentions/good deeds/even just our clarion calls for God to abolish evil NOW, like these servants wanted; you gotta understand: that might actually result in abolishing YOU/ ripping you up along with the "weeds" AROUND you. Cuz if God were to say, wipe out all evil at 12 o'clock tonight, who of us would be around at 12:01.⁴

³ Paraphrased from insight from Russ Johnson/Tony Sorci in: "5. The Threat of Religious Help (Parables #2)", April 21, 2021 - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000518029895>

⁴ Pithy anecdote about wiping out evil from J.D. Greear

Which is why, **Third**, ya gotta see that, **God's forgiveness in Christ is the ONLY way to TRULY deal with evil and suffering!** See, the beauty of Jesus' parable here is that it in NO WAY denies justice. Justice WILL be had. Jesus tells us as much with all the talk of "*reapers,*" "*fiery furnaces,*" and the "*end of the age.*" BUT the fact-of-the-matter is, Jesus only mentions those things as if to say, "*I'm telling you what I'M gonna do in the end NOT so that you'll jump in with me NOW, but so that you WON'T, because you know I've got it covered. I'M healing the world now, not through wiping out sin and evil, but through forgiving it!*" **Ya see?** In calling for patience and forgiveness, Jesus isn't dismissing injustice; No! He's saying TRUE justice will only come through a truly just-one being willing to suffer injustice, in order to then forgive it... Friends, that's the Gospel: The seemingly slow and ineffective message of God dying to forgive, and forgiveness being fully and finally offered through the finished work of Christ. Nothing more you need to achieve, accomplish or earn. I love the way **1 Peter 2:24-25** says it, "*Jesus bore (your) sins in his body on the tree, (so) that (you) might...be healed...and returned to (your true) Shepherd.*" **See that?** The deepest possible healing, reconciliation...justice coming NOT because you or I passionately protest, or powerfully take a stand, enact the proper policies, or even possess the right persona, but because we simply take God at His word: that in Christ, healing and a return to our true shepherd has already been made ours!

You understand, that is AMAZING news for at least two reasons: **One**, it means you don't have to carry the burden of actually and ultimately fixing anyone or anything anymore! You can just enjoy the privilege of pointing other evil/underserving people like yourself to the One who's already provided the fix! You can actually rest, enjoy, and I would say, be normal, cuz you aren't going around treating others/even yourself like a project constantly needing upgrades!

But **Two**, Jesus' patient forgiveness/His grace is amazing news because it really is the only thing that ACTUALLY changes you. Cuz be honest, haven't we all been woulda/coulda/should'ed-on enough/done enough of that to others? And sure, maybe in the moment that produces a response: "*Yeah I gotta work on that area of my life; yeah I oughta be better at that; yeah I gotta deal with that frustration; yeah WE as a society need to rectify that.*" In the moment that "LAW" might arouse a response, but over time/we all know this: it always fades. BECAUSE "law" doesn't actually CHANGE you. It can only RESTRAIN. Beating a horse with a stick might make it go, but it's definitely not gonna make it WANT to go. Only forgiveness and grace can do that. Or John Bunyan, author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, famously said, "*Run run the law commands, but gives us neither feet nor hands. Far better news the Gospel brings: It bids us fly and gives us wings*"...God's patience/His grace/His forgiveness/it changes you from the inside-out. And IN changing you, is the ONLY thing that gets us out of the mess our sinful/evil hearts have created.

So **Finally**/very briefly, **your best participation as it relates to the evil, injustice and brokenness you see IN and around you, is to trust and choose/trust and choose.** Cuz again, as upside down and against every impulse of ours as this might run: Jesus' kingdom doesn't invite your participation. As HE says in **vv.30, 40-41** respectively, HE is the one who'll ultimately do the judging, cleansing, and rectifying of things. His kingdom doesn't invite your participation. It invites your pursuit. Earlier in **Matthew 6:33**, He said, "*Seek first the kingdom and all these*

things will be added to you.” But He says, “*seek*”! Not MAKE the kingdom come, or ADVANCE the kingdom/CREATE the kingdom, but “*seek*” it, which is to say TRUST the King. Or to say it another way: Trust that seemingly slow and ineffective message of God dying to forgive, and forgiveness being fully and finally given through the finished work of Christ - Trust that that alone is sufficient for bringing the kingdom. Trust! And then as it relates to the brokenness and frustration you find in yourself or see all around you...Choose: Who’s side are you on? The servants and those people, organizations, even churches who say, “*we got this/ WE’LL make it happen!*” Or the farmer who says, “*No! I got this. Leave it to me/trust me!*”... Choose: Whose methods do you agree are best for dealing with evil, injustice and frustration? The servants’ and their right-handed, interventionist, deal-with-it-now methods that’ll likely hurt everyone, including themselves in the process OR the farmer’s and his seemingly weak, non-interventionist, left-handed method of allowing HIMSELF to be hurt, so that you, me and everyone we know and love can now have an opportunity to be forgiven for the mess we’ve gotten ourselves into?...Trust and Choose! Cuz be sure: What you trust-in and how you choose, shows whether or not you have, as Jesus says in **v.43**, “*ears to hear*” what’s **real reality**...**Let’s Pray... Amen!**