

Walking with Jesus

on the road to the cross

Lent
2021

Ven Lionel Whatley

Week 3



Where do all the weeds come from?

Scripture

Matthew 13:24-30

I remember leading an assembly at our local C of E primary school one morning. At the end of my little talk I said: “Are there any questions? Well, one bright little angel piped up, “Father Lionel, where did evil come from?”

I suppose that is the same as asking the question: “Where did all the weeds come from?” But there is another question. How do we get rid of them?

Some people, like Mary Baker Eddy, from *Christian Science*, try to deny the existence of evil and she tried to teach her followers that evil was some sort of “negative charge”. In other words, it’s not real.

But, of course, we know that it is all too real. We see its ugly face every time we switch on our TV or read the internet or newspaper. This reminds us that there is real good and evil in the world. This week we will look at where evil came from and how we can try to get rid of it.

To answer yesterday's question, Jesus tells a very simple story. It's found in **Matthew 13:24-30**.

Parable of the Wheat and Weeds

²⁴ Here is another story Jesus told: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. ²⁵ But that night as the workers slept, his enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat, then slipped away. ²⁶ When the crop began to grow and produce grain, the

weeds also grew. ²⁷ The farmer's workers went to him and said,

'Sir, the field where you planted that good seed is full of weeds! Where did they come from?'

²⁸ "An enemy has done this!" the farmer exclaimed. 'Should we pull out the weeds?' they asked.

²⁹ "No," he replied, "you'll uproot the wheat if you do. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds, tie them into bundles, and burn them, and to put the wheat in my barn." (NLT)

A man had a field and he sowed wheat in it as you would do in

your garden or on the allotment. One night an enemy came in and sowed weeds in it. These seeds germinated and there was no way of telling the difference between the wheat and the weeds because they looked identical.

Maybe this sort of thing still happens! In the Palestine of Jesus' day, they used a seed called darnel. This is a mild poison and if it comes into contact with the wheat it will give

it a bitter taste. In larger quantities it can become a dangerous narcotic.

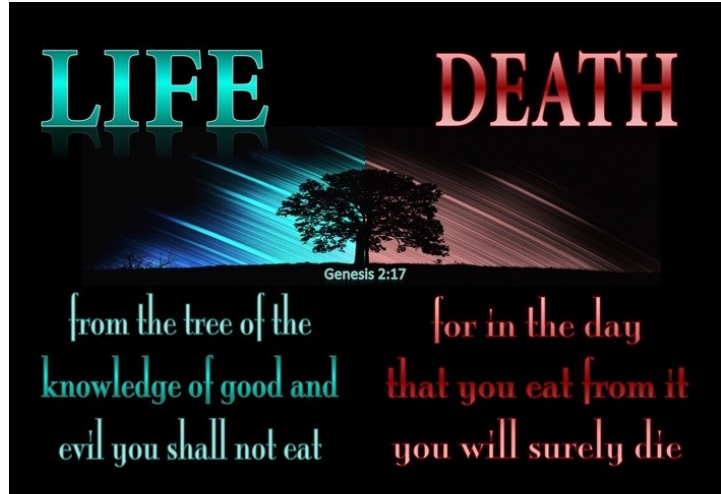
So if your neighbour irritated you then that was one way to get back at him or her. Not a nice thing to do of course!

Prayer

Lord, I sometimes get angry with other people and in my mind I plan all sorts of nasty things to do to them. Sometimes I do things or say things about them which are unkind and even untrue. Forgive me for such evil thoughts and deeds. Help me to be forgiving and generous in spirit. Amen.



There are three things that are fundamental to every Christian's understanding of evil. If we are going to deal with evil it is important that we grasp them.



Evil is alien

Evil does not belong here, not in the field that belongs to the Lord. It has no right here and was not here in the beginning. We must never think that God is responsible for evil in the world. He did not put it here. It is an invader. The first time we read about evil in the Scriptures is in **Genesis 2:17**. God tells Adam and Eve, *“You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”*

So God created humans with the ability to choose good and evil. When they chose evil, sin entered into the world as did judgement. (**Genesis 3**) This

judgement also extended to the serpent, Satan, the one who deceived humanity and continues to do so.

Prayer

Dear Lord, there is so much evil around us. The world is in crisis; creation is groaning. We hear the cry of the earth in species extinction, in the climate crisis, in systematic racial injustice, in material poverty, in conflict, in the global Covid-19 pandemic. Please help us, your people to recognise our sinfulness and to choose to repent and to return to you, our God and Father. Amen.

Yesterday we saw that evil was alien. It does not belong in God's world. The second point is:

Evil is personal

It is not, as some teach, some force. It is not an 'it'. Evil cannot exist apart from people. There was a competition in the London Times and people were asked to write an article to answer the question, 'What's wrong with the world'. The winning entry said, "I am. Yours truly, GK Chesterton." I know that it is old-fashioned in some circles to believe in a personal devil, but Jesus did and so do I. We may deny his existence; but that is exactly what he wants. Like all enemies he likes to work secretly. In the story Jesus told, he is the enemy sowing his seeds in the dark of night. You can be sure that he is up to no good. We need to see him for who he is—an enemy, an invader and a squatter.

Prayer

Lord, you taught your disciples to pray, "Deliver us from evil." Help us to resist the **evil one** when he comes to tempt us into sin. Fill us with your Holy Spirit

and help us to "put on **the whole armour of God**, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." **(Ephesians 6:11)**



Your armour is: The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit.

Evil is embodied

Satan works through people. The 'weeds' are those who do Satan's work for him or teach others to do it. We see how Satan enters Judas who betrays Jesus. Our enemy is crafty and loves to sow lies, half-truths and confusion in our minds.

When we face suffering and injustice, we often point a finger at God. If he is strong enough to stop it, why doesn't he?

Suffering is one of the greatest stumbling blocks for unbelievers. Jesus explains here why he has not yet judged the evil and suffering in the world.

Firstly he affirms that God is good and hates evil, pain and injustice. He sowed nothing but 'good seed' in the world. We, on the other hand, invited Satan's 'very bad seed' to take root in God's world. Before the end of Genesis, Adam and Eve's offspring had embraced all kinds of evil and wickedness - deception,

violence, genocide, vendettas, incest, adultery, prostitution, rape, binge drinking, idolatry, slavery and all kinds of sexual immorality. Do you see how this snowballed? Jesus tells us that suffering persists in the world not because of God's indifference, but because of his mercy. A day will come when he will root it out.

On the cross Jesus would open his arms and bear all our

sufferings. He drank the cup of human suffering and endured the full weight of Adam's curse in his crushed and broken body, and with his final breath, he cried out, "It is finished."



Prayer

Dear Lord, So often we buy into Satan's lies and like Judas we betray our Lord Jesus. Help us when we are tempted to choose what is wrong or what is expedient over what is right and honest. Help us to be honest with ourselves and with you and others. Amen

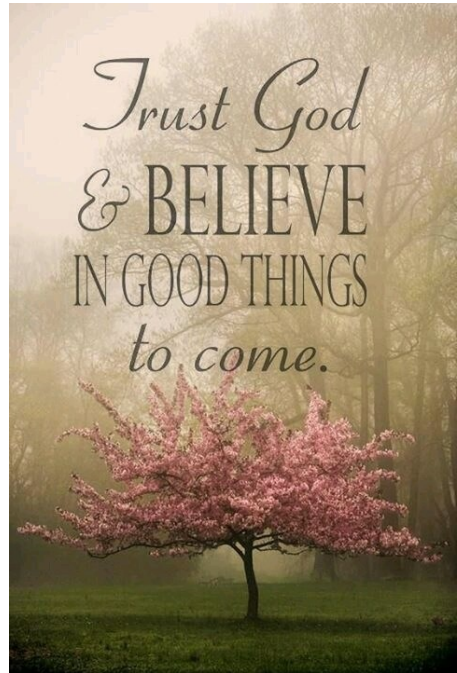
Don't pull up the weeds!

If evil is not a thing or a force but a person, and a person embodied in other persons, you cannot eradicate it without eradicating human beings. If only we could learn that lesson.

Our natural instinct is to say, "Well, let's get rid of them!" Trying to get rid of them has led to the Crusades and the Inquisition.

Jesus recommends that we do not pull up the weeds. He suggests that we leave them because if we do pull them up we will certainly pull up some of the wheat harvest with the weeds. I don't believe that Jesus calls us to eradicate evil because we know that if we do, we will not only cause a problem for the wheat but also affect the harvest; there will be less of a crop to harvest. (I'm sure Monty Don would agree with my good gardening tips here!)

Jesus tells them, *"Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters [by the way, that is the angels and not you or me] first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles*



to be burned, then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn." (Matthew 13:30)

Prayer

Dear Lord, please help us to resist the temptation to think that it is our job to eradicate evil in the world. We all too often sit in judgement on others and fail to see the 'log in our own eyes'. We know that you are the Righteous Judge. Help us to trust you even when we cannot understand why evil is allowed to go seemingly unchecked.

Weeds into Wheat?

So, this week we have learned a lot about evil, about ourselves, and about how God will deal with it in the right time. I have learned over the years that we can spend so much time focussing on the 'weeds' (evil) that we forget about the wheat harvest. I know of many Christians who are sadly so focussed on the evil and always going on about how they would like to 'get rid of them'. The question is, what is best for the wheat? That is Jesus' main concern—the harvest. It should be our concern as well.

However, I am not suggesting that we do not expose evil where we find it in society or in the Church (1 Corinthians:5-6). And neither am I suggesting that we misapply what Jesus is trying to teach us here. Let none of us dare to make this an excuse for letting evil and good grow together in our own hearts. No, the Bible teaches us that we are to deal ruthlessly with evil in ourselves.

Jeremiah 17:9 reminds us that "the heart is deceitful above all

things, and desperately wicked, who can understand it?"

We are to expose evil and bring it to the light to show it for what it is. But this must always be done prayerfully, humbly and remembering that when we point a finger at others, there are always others pointing at us.

One last and final point. I wondered why God left the wheat and the weeds to grow up together. Was it simply to protect the wheat or is there another reason? Maybe he wants to change the weeds into wheat? He is a God of miracles! So maybe that's something to think about!

Prayer

Dear Lord, You see all things and you are the Righteous Judge. Give us compassion for those who are caught up in the snare of the evil one and whose eyes have been blinded by his lies. Give us grace to pray for them and to love them sacrificially and to trust you to change their hearts and deliver them from all evil. Your Son came to destroy the deeds of the devil.