

Notes on Matthew 13 : 24 – 30, 36 - 43
'The King and the problem parable of the Weeds'

The problem the parable of the Sower raises is the question of time. That parable asks 'What time are we in?' and 'Are you living in this time of fruitfulness?' In this parable however time has run out and instead we face the problems of patience and mercy in the face of inevitable judgment.

This is a 'black and white' parable rooted in the vocation of the Son of Man to fulfil all of God's good, loving, generous, gracious plans and purposes for the world. The heart of these plans and purposes is for the world to be the best, joyful, peaceful, just and fair world it can possibly be. The parable is not about the nature of the church or the life of church as such. Instead it says it is time for us to live as the children of light who have been called and chosen to fulfil their vocation under the rule of the Son of Man. To quote Matthew 9:37-38 we are to look up and see that the fields are white unto harvest and hear the call to go and tell all the incredible Good News of Jesus. Yet also, to quote Matthew 25:37-40, we are to live as the sheep of his flock who care for the poor and the vulnerable of the world and when we do this we discover we have been doing these things unto Jesus too. The parable also tells another story. Like in the old black and white westerns, we are reminded that if there are people wearing white hats doing good, then there are people wearing black hats doing evil. It may be unfashionable but to say that people not only do evil but they are also defined by their evil acts and these acts are not of the Kingdom of Heaven or what the Son of Man calls people to do. These evil acts destroy the work of the Kingdom and are like pollutants ruining the world. Such evil in the parable is described as the enemy sowing a poisonous weed, most likely darnel, amongst the wheat and Jesus' listeners knew that Rome punished any who dared to corrupt their harvest. Rome did so because Palestine was part of her breadbasket necessary to feed her urban masses. As such punishment was inevitable so Jesus' listeners would have understood this parable to be speaking of an equally inevitable judgment by God.

God is resolved to deal with all forms of evil but yet between now and judgment the parable says the Son of Man is both patient and merciful as he doesn't want any wheat to be torn up and even for the poisonous darnel to become wheat too! The biggest problem of this parable for us is to understand and to embrace the dualism it describes. Dualism means we believe that we live at this moment in one age but yet pray and work for another age to come. Dualism means we believe it is right and proper to have a love for this world made and loved by God but not a love of this world in its present corrupted state. Dualism means we believe judgment is real but not as an arbitrary act against individuals but in God putting the world right. Dualism means we believe that evil is to be understood in a black and white sense but not according to our cultural preferences but by the

Bible's; something easier said than done. Finally, dualism means we believe that we are called to live lives utterly different to how other people live. In the parable we are described as those seeking to shine like stars in the sky, as in Daniel 12:3.

Are you still looking at your watches? The parable urges us not to shake them to see if they're still working because it can seem as if the Son of Man is doing nothing, he is, he is being patient. He yearns for none to be lost, for all to hear and to respond to the Good News. His patience is a reminder to us that evangelism is fundamental to who we are as a church, as stated in our vision statement of 'Enabling all to meet Jesus'. Yet the church isn't to be merely a life boat. It is time we ditch this image that can encourage an indifference to the world for as the children of the light we are called to shine the light of Jesus into this Mars Bar world of work, rest and play we live in. As we do this we know evil is real praying for God to put this world right yet also showing mercy too. The parable, as it describes the work of the children of light and dark, reminds us our vocation is to live as light in the anticipation of our hearing our King saying to us, 'Well done, good and faithful servants'.

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1. What is being sown by the Son of Man, ie Jesus, in the field of the world?
2. How do Matthew 9:37-38 and Matthew 25:37-40 shape how we serve Jesus in the world as the children of light?
3. Who do you think are the 'sons of the evil one' today and why?
4. Why is this a parable of judgment and how do you understand why judgment matters in God's loving rule of his creation?
5. What defines the time between now and judgment and why is this Good News?
6. Do you understand anything of what Andy is saying about Dualism? What doesn't make sense in all of this?
7. Why do you think Andy is speaking about when he describes us shaking our watches when nothing seems to be happening?
8. What does it mean for to live shining like the stars in heaven, as in Daniel 12:3?