

# Impatiently Yours

## Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

### July 23, 2017

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#### INTRODUCTION

We live in interesting times, don't we? Sometimes, a little too interesting. Sometimes, life can be a little overwhelming. We wonder when things will finally get better for us and possibly even for the world. We ask when God will act to set things right.

But in many ways, we are much closer to what was going on in Jesus' time than we might think. The questions we ask today were the same ones people were asking in Jesus' time and the same ones he was responding to in his parable about the wheat and tares or weeds.

#### THE LESSON FROM MATTHEW

##### The Biblical Context

We know King Herod the Great from the story about the wise men coming to see Jesus. We read in the Bible that he ordered the murder of all children under two in an effort to kill Jesus. We know from history that he did murder anyone he thought threatened his reign.

What most of us don't know is how great a builder he was. When he was alive, he commissioned a number of impressive building projects: palaces in strategic areas, like the one at Masada, that could be easily defended; aqueducts to bring water to Jerusalem and other cities; and, of course, the Temple in Jerusalem.

He died eventually while Jesus was still very young. The big building projects stopped. Many people lost their jobs. They couldn't pay their taxes and so many lost their farms. Many turned to crime. Many turned to terrorism – determined to drive out the foreigners in their country and regain some sort of stability and security in their lives.

That's the situation Jesus encountered in his ministry: Judea struggling under Roman rule. Romans controlled "everything" – or so it seemed. Even if there Jewish leaders in some kind of government – and for a time that did exist at least in Galilee – they were Roman collaborators or Roman puppets. Even the High Priest was suspect – either of lining his own pocket or of colluding with the enemy.

The overriding question of the day was: ***when will God act? When will the Messiah come to drive out these evil Romans?***

We know of Jesus but there were actually many who claimed to be the Messiah. Some even performed miracles. People would follow this one – or that one – when he was killed, they would start looking for a new Messiah.

##### Jesus & the Parable

So that's the background to today's passage.

Jesus knew what people were asking. He knew what they wanted to hear from him. **When will God act? Now! I am the Messiah. I am the one who will destroy the Romans and make Judea great again.**

And so, he begins with a story that every farmer – and even anyone who dabbled in gardening like me – would understand.

That's the background to today's parable. It was easy for people to understand – something every farmer would know about.

*A farmer plants seeds – it's going to be a good crop – but something happens and somehow weeds end up growing in-between the good crops. What's a farmer to do?*

The normal response – the one people were waiting for – was to get rid of the weeds while they're still young. Get rid of the weeds before they choke healthy plants and take over the field. Get rid of the Romans before they get any more settled in our country and kill any more of our people.

But that's not what Jesus said. He said, *"Let the weeds stay – let both good and bad crops grow together. When it's time to harvest, that's when they'll be separated."*

Imagine the response... "Wait?" **Small wonder that people began to drift away from Jesus.** They wanted a Messiah but Jesus wasn't the Messiah they were looking for. They couldn't understand why he was telling them to wait. They wanted results **NOW!** They were impatient for God to act.

## **BRIDGE**

As I said at the beginning, there's a lot of similarities between what was happening in Jesus' day and was is happening in ours.

Their impatience is something I understand because impatience is one of my flaws. I'm working on it but still – I want things settled and I want them NOW!

## **A LESSON FOR US TODAY**

### **Today's Want List**

Impatience is probably a failing that many of us have. We look at the world and we want it to be better. We want people to be able to live in safety – without fear. That means we want **criminals** sent to prison for as long as they're a threat. We want **terrorists** to be caught and probably killed. We want **predators** to find out what it's like to be preyed upon. We want our **enemies** to be defeated. **We want a world where justice reigns – where there's no place for corruption or collusion.**

We want people to live in **harmony** with one another and, of course, – and we know that this is going a little too far – we want people to hold think more or less like us – to have the **same views** on things and the same values. We want a better world, and that means a better world as far as nature goes too – no natural disasters, no outbreak of awful diseases, and no animal horror stories. **We want a world where we can enjoy life, not worry about finances or taxes or losing one's home or farm.**

God promised us a better world and the Bible describes what that world would be like and it's something we want – a world where the lion lays down with the lamb, and hunger and sickness and even war are things of the past – a world where all can live in harmony and peace. God's world – God's kingdom on earth.

So why doesn't God act NOW? And, if we're honest, we're probably sympathetic to the ancient Jews who wanted to get rid of the weeds before they had a chance to take over the field ... **which means that most of us would have problems with Jesus' parable.**

### **Hope for the Present**

But even though we are too often impatient and want God to act right NOW on **our timetable**, we have God's promise that he will act **but on his timetable.**

What that means is that evil will grow. If you ever feel that things are getting worse – well, they are. But remember – the weeds may be growing but so is the good crop. Things may be getting worse, but they're also getting better.

Just think – years ago, most people didn't have the right to vote. Women weren't even considered to be people, and it was common for women to die in childbirth or cooking – remember, in the old days you judged how hot the oven was by sticking your arm in!

Years ago, slavery was the norm. Now, however and through much of the world, it's illegal. We know, of course, that it still exists even if it's not called slavery. Abominable working conditions, child labour, sex trade – yes, those atrocities exist but what has changed is our attitude towards them. Something inside us

tells us that those things are wrong. We may not have the willpower to change them, but we no longer consider such actions to be “right.”

We know better. That awareness is God’s sense of goodness growing within us and within the world. The good crop is growing alongside the bad. **Don’t give up hope. The world is still in God’s hands.**

### **Medieval Story**

Years ago, a minister told the following story about the Middle Ages...

There was a young nobleman who lived a very debauched life – drinking, gambling, and playing around with lots of women. The local priest kept trying to get him to reform his ways and become a better Christian, but without success.

Eventually, the nobleman’s father died; the nobleman was now the master and had inherited everything. The priest tried once again to get him to reconsider his lifestyle. The nobleman replied, “I want to check it out for myself. I want to see if what you’re telling me about Christianity and the Church is true. I’m going to Rome.”

The priest blanched. The Church in the Middle Ages was pretty corrupt. People were forced into becoming priests, monks or nuns regardless of what they wanted, and corruption was the result. The Pope and other officials in the Church not only had mistresses; they also had children. Many were more interested in power than in God. The priest knew the nobleman would discover all of that when he went to Rome.

Some time passed – the nobleman returned from Rome and told the priest he wanted to join the Church. The priest was astounded. “You ... you went to Rome?” he asked.

“Yes,” the nobleman replied.

“And you saw what was going on in Rome?”

“Yes,” the nobleman responded, “and if the Church can survive 1000 years of what I saw in Rome, then God **has to be** involved!”

...

Too often we forget that God **is** involved in the world. And that, even as evil has its day and bad things happen, God is there, often working behind the scenes to nurture and nourish people – the Church – the good crop ... **but on his timetable.**

### **A Transformation**

But we’re still impatient and unaware that things are getting better even though the world is still falling apart just isn’t satisfying – we want something **on our timetable**

That’s where the interpretation in the second half of the reading comes in. With his interpretation, Jesus transforms the story from a normal, everyday situation, and gives us a message of grace and hope that we very much need to hear.

What’s different? We’re **no longer talking about “We-good” and “You-bad”** – good Jews and bad Romans. The story is transformed into an **apocalyptic vision** – a story about the end of the world and the last judgment. Jesus gave a different ending from what people expected and in so doing he gives us a glimpse of how God sees us, and how he sees the world.

**Let’s start with a simple question – are we good people?**

If we’re honest with ourselves, we know that the answer is, **“Yes, sometimes but sometimes we’re bad.”** – we’re a mixture of good and bad. Which part wins at any particular moment depends too often on how we’re feeling – how much rest we’ve had – how busy we are – and what is stressing us out at the moment.

In other words, we're like the field in Jesus' parable. We've got both wheat and tares – good crop and weeds – growing within us. What happens if God were to judge us right now? Would we have more wheat to show for our life or more weeds?

### **Maybe having a bit more time is a blessing after all?**

Years ago, I was involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue. One time, we were discussing the Holocaust when this Jewish girl – and I'm sorry but I remember her name – said the most remarkable statement I've ever heard: **She was sorry that Hitler had killed himself.**

At first, I thought she was sorry that he had not stood trial for his war crimes, that he had not suffered in prison as he had made so many suffer, and that he had not been executed in some public and humiliating fashion.

But that's not she meant at all. **She was sorry that Hitler had committed suicide because he had robbed himself of the chance to repent.**

The chance to repent – to turn his life around. By killing himself, Hitler had cheated himself of God's mercy.

We may like to think that we're better than Hitler but, as Christians, we believe that we are all sinners. We have all fallen away from what we should be – in other words, we're imperfect human beings. We may not be as bad as Hitler was, but that's a far cry from saying we're good.

In fact, our Gospel message that we preach is quite simple: It's because human beings are flawed and do make mistakes that **we need Jesus.**

- God **so loved** the world that he came to us as Jesus and was willing to die for us on the cross.
- God **loves** the world so much that he comes to me (and you) as Jesus and died for me (and you) on the cross.

Jesus reminds us and shows us just how much he loves us today. And God/Jesus has given us his Holy Spirit to teach us, guide us and –perhaps more importantly – work within us, transforming us to becoming the people God wants us to be.

When we accept Jesus, we don't suddenly become perfect because we know we aren't. When we let the Holy Spirit into our lives and let God work within us, we see a transformation taking place. Some of those weeds seem to be transforming into good crop... **Maybe we're like dandelions** – we seem to be weeds and then find out we're useful after all and in ways we didn't foresee.

And it's all because we're living on God's timetable and God's giving us the time to finish growing – he'll judge us by our end product, not by the struggles and failures of our day-to-day lives.

### **CONCLUSION**

We may be impatient, but God isn't.

We may be overcome by everything that's going on in the world and in our lives – but we're not alone and, if we could see the world through God's eyes, we might discern – or catch a glimpse of – God's overarching plan ... a promise, a hope, and a transformation.

**That's why we need time and God's Spirit working in us.** Jesus' parable tells us – promises us – that God gives us that time. We may be impatient but God isn't. AMEN.