

Prayer

We have faith in You, Lord Jesus Christ, because You have touched our lives. You have saved us from the enemy, You have healed us of sin and sickness, You have befriended us and led us on our way, and You will bring us to our final destiny in glory. All praise be to You, Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Finance

In a week in which the financial institutions of the world have been in turmoil, continue to pray urgently against the evils which are making a few very rich and others very poor.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those who risk their lives to help keep international peace*
- *Pray against corruption in high places, in politicians and leaders*
- *Give thanks for those who have recently been baptised*

Meditation

It is a wonderful thing to know and trust God's healing touch.

He heals when we confess all our sins;
He heals by forgiveness with a touch of His Spirit.

He heals before we know we have a need;
He heals even if we have been bound for years.

He heals when our hearts cry out and call for help;
He heals through the love of those who do His will.

He heals as we turn around and reach for Him:
He heals by doing miracles; we know not why!

He heals at any time or place, He knows no bounds;
He heals us completely, in body, soul and spirit.

He heals because He loves us, and His compassion never ceases!

Bible Study - Matthew 13:36-43

³⁶ Then he left the crowds and went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.'³⁷ He answered, 'The sower of the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸ the field is the world, the good seed are the children of the kingdom, the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are uprooted and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all that causes sin and all who do evil, ⁴² and they will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be distress and anguish. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Anyone who has ears should listen!'

Review

The parable of the 'wheat and the tares' was told by Jesus (13:24-30) as part of a sequence of parables which explain the Kingdom of God. We have already studied the general themes of this parable, so we will now look in more detail at Jesus' own analysis, given privately for the disciples. It is clearly about how evil grows in the world alongside good, and the difficulty of separated good from evil before God's final harvest (13:40f.). However, the wider picture painted by Jesus is much more up-beat, anticipating the glorious success of the Kingdom which is never in doubt in the mind of God the Father; 'the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Anyone who has ears should listen!' (13:43)

In this instance, the disciples asked Jesus for an explanation of the parable; it doubtless caused some confusion and uncertainty then just as it does now! Jesus replied to the disciples by immediately identifying himself as the sower of good seed (13:37), referring to himself as 'the Son of Man', as He had done before (Matt 8:20ff; 9:2; 10:23etc.). He explained the basic themes of the parable; 'the field is the world, the good seed are the children of the kingdom, the weeds are the children of the evil one ...' (13:38).

It is very important for us to recognise that the parable is not about the trials and tribulations of disciples within the church, but about the disciple's mission within the world. All those who follow Christ live alongside 'children of the evil one' in the world and can expect troubles and persecution; but we have a job to do which is to grow and produce fruit. We can also be confident that if we follow the call, God will make us fruitful (see the parables of 'the mustard seed' and 'the yeast' 13:31-33). It is interesting to note that in the previous 'parable of the sower', the seed was the same but the soils were different. Now in this parable, the soil is the same but the seeds are different! There has been much discussion about the type of weeds mentioned here, but it was probably a creeping plant called 'darnel', which was hard to distinguish from wheat, but eventually grew black seeds which were late forming and bore a fungus that could be poisonous to people. For this reason, it was removed from a field at harvest, and dried out to make a useful fuel for burning. Roman law considered it to be so dangerous that the sowing of it was banned, and its distribution was commonly accepted as profoundly evil.

The enemy who sows the seeds under the cover of darkness (13:25) is the devil (13:39). Jesus was unafraid to speak openly about the nature of evil, because He had come into the world to defeat it and establish the Kingdom of God. In this parable, the devil copies under the cover of darkness what the Son of Man did in the previous parable; he sows. Part of the deception of evil is that it mimics the work of God, and Jesus' explanation of this parable reveals this important truth. The evidence of the work of the devil, however, is in the fruit of his work, as represented by the growth of the banned and evil darnel. Jesus does not connect the darnel with any individuals or people, but it is likely that Jesus saw them as people like the Pharisees who had actively rejected Him and sought to kill Him (12:14). We will observe the children of evil in our own day in different ways.

The climax of the parable occurs at the 'end of the age' when angels reap and gather a harvest (13:39). The parable of 'sower' was all about the husbandry of the soil that affected the yield of the harvest, but here, the harvest is all important. At the harvest, no comment is made about its size, because the important thing is the purity of the fruit or seed obtained. The separation is done not by fallible human hands but by the angelic workers of God, who make no mistake! There really will be an end to all evil when the 'sons of evil' perish, whoever they are; and it is not ours to worry about who they are. Our judgements about what is evil and what is good in this world are frequently fickle and based on personal experiences; but in God's eyes what is good or evil is determined by what is fruitful in the Kingdom. His judgement is final, not ours.

Lastly, Darnel was dried and burned to produce fuel for the home; and the parable describes the 'children of the evil one' (13:38) being gathered up and burned after the harvest. We may find it difficult to think of such destruction by fire, especially at God's hands, but to think like this awkwardly twists the whole meaning of the parable. Are we to suggest that because we do not like the idea of punishment for evil then we would rather live in eternity with evil all around us? This is not the aim of the Kingdom of God, but a complete misunderstanding of the parable. The 'righteous will shine' (13:43) in the Kingdom because all evil has been defeated!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What does Jesus' interpretation of the parable of the 'wheat and the tares' add to our understanding of the Kingdom of God?
2. In what ways does Jesus' emphasis on the 'end of the age' help our understanding of the nature of evil?
3. What can we learn from this passage about the way God works to defeat all evil in our midst?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Evil is all around us, and sometimes makes itself known. More often than not, it is disguised as good, and to spot it we need discernment from the Lord, then the question becomes one that only God can answer for us; do we ignore it and get on with the work of the Kingdom, or is it so obstructive that we must be rid of it? Dealing with evil is one of the hardest things we have to do, and making judgements about this is very hard, but by the grace of God and with the discernment He gives us, it is possible to deal with these things.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *What evils exist within the church and amongst the people of God, simply because we are people who live in the world and cannot be extracted from it until the Lord receives us in glory? Think about these things over the coming few days and ask the Lord to show you how to handle the evil you see.*
- *Join an action group to campaign against some evil or injustice within society; perhaps child abuse or prejudice against the poor or racial issues. By involving ourselves in such things, we put God's Kingdom work into action in this world.*

Final Prayer

You, Lord Jesus Christ, have won the total victory over Satan which guarantees the end of all evil. All praise to You, Living Lord! May we accept this truth, live this truth and proclaim this all our lives, without fear of the one who has been defeated! Thanks be to God; AMEN