

Why is the Church Such a Mess?
Matthew 13:18–23
Pastor Jeremy Cagle, August 8, 2021

We are going to be talking about hell in just a minute. But I didn't want to scare you guys in the introduction. It was for the conclusion. But in all seriousness though, it was a blessing to see the names of all the new members, wasn't it? I told you before that when we started meeting like this, we didn't really know what to expect, because we'd never done this before. This was a first time thing for us. But the response has been great. We've seen as many as 50 new visitors come through our doors, I guess, if you could call these doors, some from as far away as Surrey. So there's some that are driving an hour just to be here with us every week. I'm amazed that they can find us out here on the farm, but they do. And in order to celebrate that, we're going to have a picnic this afternoon, as you're aware, so you can meet the new members personally and just welcome them in. One thing we've noticed as we started meeting again is that many of our older members don't know who the new ones are. They haven't seen them before because we're meeting in two different services. And we're kind of passing each other in the night. And so what we want to do in order to fix that is we're going to put you all together in one place.

And in fact, as I was reflecting on that, it occurred to me this afternoon will be the first time our entire church has been together in one place since March of 2020. Since that time, we have been either meeting in really small numbers, or we've been meeting in multiple services. But this will be the first time we can tell everybody, hey, all of you guys just come, in about a year and a half. So this is a special event for that reason, too. And please join us for that, if you can. We would love to see you out there at the home of Luke and Natasha. Their address is in the bulletin. Again, it starts at 3:30. Dinner will be at five o'clock. So we're looking forward to that.

And with that said, this morning, I want to invite you to open your Bibles with me to the Gospel of Matthew, because that's the book we're going to be in today. If you would, open your Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew. And as you're turning there, I told you before, this next week we're going to start a new series here at Grace on the book of Ecclesiastes. These messages on the church have been a little bit scattered because we jumped around from book to book, but next week we're going to land in one place for a while and it'll be in Ecclesiastes, which is a very strange book, if you've read it, because it's so depressing. It's such a discouraging book to read because it was written by a man who came to the end of his life. And he said, "I wasted it." He said, "I blew my life," because he spent it on silly things like money and pleasure and fun. And the message of the book is, "You don't want to repeat my mistake." That's what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes. "You don't want to do what I did with my life." And we're going to talk about that next week.

But for this time, for this morning, we're going to give one more sermon on the church, and in honor of membership Sunday. And it's going to be in Matthew 13, if you want to turn over there, starting in verse 24. I just want to read that to you as we begin. It says,

Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

We'll stop the reading there. But what you have just read here in your Bibles is known as the parable of the wheat and tares, or the parable of the weeds. It's one of Jesus' most famous sermons in the Bible. And just to introduce it a little bit, if you're familiar with the New Testament, you'll know Jesus did this a lot when he preached. He liked

to preach in parables, or stories with a deeper meaning behind them, because most of his audience couldn't read. They were illiterate, so they couldn't write notes as he preached, and so he put them in stories so they could remember them. If you've grown up in church, you have all kinds of Jesus' parables just going around in your mind all the time. That was the point of them, so you can remember. And he also did it as a form of judgment against his enemies since a lot of his audience was hostile toward him. The Bible says he gave parables "so that seeing you shall not see and hearing you may not hear." It was a form of judgment.

But all in all, when you add it up, Jesus gave us 40 parables in the Bible, most of which are found in the Gospel of Matthew. If you break it down by the numbers, there are 10 parables in Mark, 10 in Luke, John doesn't have any, and there are 22 found in Matthew, because Matthew wrote about the kingdom. He wanted to show you that Jesus is the king of the world. So he gave you this section in his gospel, where everything starts off with the phrase, "The kingdom of heaven is like..." this. "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed," and, "The kingdom of heaven is like a pearl."

And here it says the kingdom is like a field that has wheat and tares in it. It has good seed and bad seed. He said that because if you look back up in verse one, Jesus taught this parable from a boat on the Sea of Galilee, which means that as he said this, he was surrounded by fields, because the Sea of Galilee is kind of like, at the bottom are several steep cliffs that are surrounded in farmland. And in fact, when you pass through the sea, it's like you're passing through a tunnel of farmland. It's just all around you on all the sides. And as his audience was sitting in a setting like that, he told them the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field while his enemy planted bad. In fact, right before he says this, if you look in verse nine, he says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." And in the parallel passage in Luke eight, it says Jesus was doing this constantly during the sermon. He was saying over and over again, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." You need to listen to me, he says, because the people weren't doing that. He kept saying over and over again, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear," because they were ignoring him because they were tares among the wheat. A lot of the people he was speaking to were bad seed. And so he gave them this parable to shock them out of it. The word for tare here in verse 25, it's helpful because it's the main idea of the passage, but it's a Greek word that means a tare or a weed or some kind of obnoxious plant you don't want in your garden.

I have a unique perspective on this because the first church I ever pastored was in a very rural part of the US. And when I taught on this passage, the farmers told me that in the wheat fields in Illinois, they have a plant they call cheat, because it looks just like a wheat plant, but it's not. It's an imposter. Because it grows as high as the real thing. It has the same color and texture and feel. But it's a tare. It's the same plant Jesus is referring to here. Apparently this grows in Israel. It grows in North America and in other parts of the world. Some cultures call it ryegrass or bearded darnel. The Latin name is *lolium temulentum*. But it's dangerous because it can really do a number on you if you eat it. Horses get indigestion from this stuff. Barn owls have been known to get dizzy and faint. Human beings can die. If you eat enough tares, you'll die.

But Jesus uses it here because it's a perfect illustration of what he's saying. Because he says one reason the church is such a mess is because it has tares in it. One reason the kingdom of God is so sloppy is because it has cheat among the wheat. Because it has people who come to Jesus and say they're listening when they're not. It has people that come to church and say they're Christians because they sing with us, and they pray with us. And they read and evangelize and go to our picnics, but they're not saved at all. They're just faking it. I don't have to tell you that everything that glitters isn't gold. And everyone who says they're spiritual is not. Some people are lying to you because they're lost, or maybe they're just lying to themselves.

And before we get into that, I just want you to see Jesus' interpretation of this. If you look further down in verse 36, just so you can see what he's saying here, he actually tells you what he's referring to in the parable. Because it says,

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.”

That's interesting, because he'd said seven parables in there, but this is the one that caught their attention. So they wanted to ask him about it.

And he said, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”

Jesus says that at the end of the parable again because of the importance of it. He says, you need to listen to this. If you don't hear anything else I'm saying, he says, you don't want to be a tare. He says during the church age, the devil—these are sons of the devil—will plant tares among the wheat. And they'll grow up together until judgment day when they'll be separated. But in this life, he says, there will be no separation. The two will go hand in hand. In fact, if you notice, Jesus spends a lot of time on judgment day here. He talks about it from verse 39 all the way down to verse 43 to show you the gravity of this. God will judge the tares. And make no mistake, he'll take them out of the field one day, but until that day, the church will look like this. It'll be messy.

You know, friends, it's no accident the church is in the shape it's in today. There's no mystery. There's no random reason why Christians fight so much. They do it because they're not all Christian. It's been said that every time the Lord builds a church, Satan builds a chapel, because he likes to create a counterfeit of the one true thing. And that's what you see everywhere you go. If you remember our sermon from last week, we talked about Judas Iscariot, who was so good at deceiving the other disciples that when Jesus said, “You have a traitor in your midst,” they didn't know who it was. They went around the room saying, “Lord is it I?” “Lord is it me?” because he was such a good pretender. Jesus says here that Judas is not alone in that. There are hundreds or 1000s of Judases, millions of them all across the world.

In fact, some of you have told me that you left your previous church for the simple reason that you couldn't find any Christians there, in a church, in a body of Christ. And I've talked to young people that have said they left their Bible college for the same reason. They went there to learn the Bible, but no one taught it. We could call this the Church of the Tares, or the Church of the Unsaved Christians, if there is such a thing, because that's all they have. Which is why things are so messy.

You know, just to highlight this, in my studies this week, I came across a list of 25 things the church is fighting over today. And it was pretty funny because it included things like the length of the pastor's beard. You guys don't have that problem here. Or the type of juice you put in the Lord's Supper because some wanted grape juice and some wanted apple, so they fought. They fought over who gets to purchase stamps for the church office. They fought over who puts pictures in the lobby. But the reason they did that at the end of the day is because there's so much cheat among the wheat. People are on two different sides of the field here.

And that's what I want to talk to you about this morning. Because this morning, we're going to look at several ways that Satan messes with the church. That's our outline for today. If you're taking notes in Matthew 13, we're going to look at several ways Satan messes with the church. And we're going to do this because you really can't finish a discussion of church life without talking about why it's like this. We could talk about what the church is supposed to be all day long. But at some point, you've got to back up the truck and talk about why it's not the way it's supposed to be.

In fact, I know this is not a very encouraging thing to talk about on membership Sunday. But I want to do this because I want our new members to know what you're signing up for when you join us. You're signing up for a mess, amen? You're signing up for a work in progress. It's that way with this church, that church, or any church. It's that way with this congregation, that congregation, or the other one down the road. We have a long way to go because there's tares here. We have some wonderful people at Grace, but they're sinners just like everyone else. And we have the same problems other churches do. And you need to know that when you commit yourself to the ministry here. I don't want there to be any surprises. It's been said, if you find the perfect church, don't join it, because you're only going to mess it up with your sin. And it's the same way here. This is not a perfect church.

And for the new members, I just want to say a special word to you about this. But a day is going to come when you'll be disappointed with us. I promise you, it's just inevitable. It always happens. A day will come and we'll let you down. And when that day comes, I just want to ask you to do something for me. Please don't leave. Don't run away. Stick around and work it out with us. Because we're all dealing with the same problem here. There's a devil in our midst. There's an enemy here. But the good news is that the Bible has given us a way to deal with that. And that's what I want to talk to you about this morning, with several ways that Satan messes with the church in this passage. And the first one—and these are all very simple—the first one is by planting seeds in it.

The first way that Satan messes with the church is by putting seeds in it. Which means he doesn't just sit around and watch the Lord build his church and build his kingdom. He tries to stop it by putting imposters in its midst. If you want to know why Judas was in the disciples, it was because of the devil. And if you want to know why there's hypocrites in churches today, it's the same reason. He's the greatest hypocrite on the planet, Satan is. And he wants his followers to be the same. And if you look in verse 24, he talks about this when it says that,

Jesus presented another parable to them saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.”

Just to tell you what he's saying here, as I told you before, the place where this parable occurred was in a very rural part of Israel where the farmers lived. If you went to the land of Israel back then, you would see it divided into three parts. You had Judea in the south, where Jerusalem was. The temple was there and all the high priests and people like that. And then you had Samaria in the middle where the where the outcasts were. That's where the foreigners lived. And then up above that you had Galilee where the farmers were. It was a land of day laborers and blue collar workers. Jesus was a carpenter because that's the kind of work everybody did in the world that he lived in. So this was something they could relate to, because they all knew what it meant to sow seed in a field.

It was a different culture back then. They didn't have tractors like we do today. So what they would do is they would take a slave, drape a sack of seed across his shoulders, and have him go around and spread it like this. He would just cast it as far and as wide as he could. They didn't have modern machinery. So they would just pick up a bag, put their hand in the bag, and just throw it everywhere. If you've read the parable of the soils, and you read about the seed that fell on the road, you read that and you kind of wonder, well, how bad were they at farming, that they would throw seed on a road? Well, they weren't bad at it, they just threw it everywhere. That's how they did it. The idea was, the more it went out, the more results you had. Because this was such hard work, what happens next is really cruel. If you look in verse 25, it said that,

While his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away.

Because that was so cruel, there were actually Roman laws against doing this, sowing seed in another man's field, sowing tares in there. You could be flogged for this. You could be thrown in jail. But as the story goes on, while the slaves of the first farmer are sleeping, the enemy puts poisonous plants among the good ones. He puts cheat among the wheat. They didn't just fall from the sky; he put them there. You would have to really hate someone in

order to do this. It took a lot of work. Because you had to go out and basically repeat the process of the first farmer and scatter it row by row, hour by hour. He probably did it at night, obviously. This was done in secret.

But the point here is that the devil does this because he hates the church. He goes through all this trouble because he can't stand it. I heard one pastor say the busiest person in the church is not the preacher; it's the devil because he never sleeps, never takes a break, never takes a holiday. And that's what you're reading here. In fact, the phrase "among the wheat" shows how much he did this, because he spread it everywhere. There wasn't a square inch of the church where the devil did not put his tares in it. So if you go to the church in Canada, you'll find tares there. And then if you go to the church in the United States, you'll find tares there. And then if you go to the church in China, or Mexico, or Africa, same problem. The devil has put his tares everywhere. That's why I encourage new members. If you have a problem here, don't leave, because you're gonna find a problem there. Amen? It's just the same thing. This also says he does it while the servants are sleeping. And that's important because it means he did it when they weren't paying attention. Because the leaders were all caught up in silly things like figuring out what kind of juice to put in the Lord's Supper. They were distracted. That's when he put the tares in.

But the lesson here, and the point Jesus wants you to get, is that God is not the only one who's interested in the church. The devil is, too. God is not the only one putting people in the church. Satan is as well. Which means, and here's the humbling part of this passage, that some of our people might have been put in our church by Satan. That's the scary part of all this. But some of the folks at Grace Fellowship Church might have been planted here by the devil. And I don't have a list of people when I say that, but that's the point. We don't know who they are. That's what the parable's about. You can't put a list of tares because you can't identify them. But they're there.

A lot of people today say, "Isn't it so good to have a bunch of people come to your church?" Well, it kind of depends on the people, doesn't it? Because you don't want to like this, a church full of weeds. But they say, "Isn't it good to see the church grow? Well, yeah, it is, but grow with what? Not with this material. How many of you want your garden to be full of this? Listen, friends, the fact of the matter is that some people don't come here because they want to know God. Some people come here for other things. They want someone to like them, or they want someone to respect them, or they just like hanging out with Christians. But they don't do it because they believe. They don't do it because they trust in Jesus. Because they're cheat. They're not the real thing.

And just to lighten this up a little bit, I believe J. C. Ryle was right when he said that there are tares today who can be wheat tomorrow. There are people who are lost today who can be saved tomorrow. It happens all the time in the church. If you read people's testimonies, so many of them tell us that they went to church their entire life and got saved later on. It happens.

But that doesn't change the fact that this might be what some of us are this morning, a child of the devil. In fact, when he's explaining this parable to the disciples, he tells us in verse 38, that these are sons of the evil one. So when we say they're children of the devil, that's not a stretch. That's actually what Jesus says. Because this parable is not for the lost people out there. The parable is for the lost people in here. The parable is not for those who are out at the bar getting drunk every night; it's for those who go to church. That's the intention of this lesson. The devil loves religion. And it needs to be a warning to all of us today.

I heard this story once of a preacher who ministered in a little country church where an old man came up to him every Sunday after the service, and he said, "Oh, that was a great sermon, preacher. I'm so glad brother so and so was here to hear it." Every Sunday, he'd come up and say the same thing. "I'm so glad somebody else heard that." So one day a storm happened in the town, and the only people who came to church was the old man and the preacher, and the preacher said, Okay, I got him now. There's no way he's gonna say that to me this morning. So sure enough, after the message, the old man came up to him and with tears in his eyes, he said, "Preacher, that was some sermon. I only wish brother so and so was here to listen to it."

And I tell you that story because some of you may be approaching church like that today. “This sermon’s for someone else. All this spiritual stuff is for somebody else.” And if that’s the case, I want to tell you, you’re the kind of person this is talking about. You don’t want to think that way today. All this stuff is for you as well. Which brings us to another point to consider this morning, another way Satan messes with the church, and that is by planting bad fruit in it.

So first, he puts seeds in the church. But the second way Satan messes with the church is by putting bad seeds in it. Which means he doesn’t just put seeds in there, but he puts ones in here that do us harm. It caused great disturbance among the people. And if you look in verse 26, it goes on and says,

But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also.

I mentioned to you a moment ago that the you can’t really tell the difference between a wheat and a tare until harvest time, because for the rest of the year, they look the same. It takes about four to five months to from planting to harvesting wheat, a considerable amount of time. So for most of this time, it says the farmer didn’t even notice them, but around harvest time, verse 26 says the wheat sprouted grain and the tares didn’t. To explain that, every fall in the land of Israel around harvest time, the wheat plant matures, and it sprouts a cone shaped fuzzy ball at the end of it. If you’ve seen wheat before, you know what I’m talking about. It’s a brown oblong container of seeds that looks different from the rest of the plant. It isn’t that pretty. It’s a pretty ugly thing to look at. But it’s big enough to see from far away. And it’s what the farmer used to spot the imposters in here. He doesn’t look at other parts of the plant. He looks at the grain or the fruit. You can’t see the root. You can’t see underneath the plant. So he just looks at what’s on top of it. And that’s what Jesus refers to here when he says that the tares became evident also.

The word “evident” here, it’s a Greek word that means “shed light on something”, or it could be translated “radiate” or “shine” in other parts of the Bible. And the idea here is that a time is coming when the tares won’t be able to hide anymore, because their true nature will shine forth. It’ll radiate out of them. Because they don’t have any fruit. If you notice in verse 26, the problem here is not that they bear bad fruit; they just don’t bear any fruit. The problem is not that they’re doing horrible, wrong things. The problem is, they’re just not doing anything at all, anything that a wheat plant would do. The fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, it’s not found in them. And so the farmer has to deal with it.

To make this real practical here, if you’re wondering what this looks like, remember, the tares are religious people. These are church going folk. And so these are not the kind of people who are going to go out and murder someone. The tares are not the kind of souls who will go out and sell drugs. Instead, these are the kind of people who would do the respectable sins like jealousy, lust, and anger. These are the kind of people that are going to give into pride, anxiety, and greed because you can’t notice those things. They can do them in secret. They’re trying to hide their sin.

And I mention that because some of you might look at a passage like this and say, “Well, that doesn’t describe me, Pastor Jeremy, because I don’t follow the devil. I’m not a worshipper of his.” And I’m glad to hear it. But let me ask you, do you ever get angry with someone? That’s what this is talking about here. Do you ever get mad or tell a lie or get jealous or let your pride get the best of you? That’s what a tare does. That’s what an imposter does in the church.

And just to clarify, this is not referring to those who act that way and repent. It’s like we said last week, this is not referring to those who act that way and make it right with God. This is referring to those who don’t. They don’t stop. They just keep giving in.

Friends, this is important, because this is why people fight so much in the church. This is why churches split. They split because of pride. Because someone has a pet peeve or pet doctrine that they bring up every time you

see them, like a dog with a bone, until the thing blows up. Or they they're angry. They're angry people. They blow up at the slightest provocation. And so anytime there's a spark, the whole thing comes crashing down. That's the kind of thing Jesus is talking about here. That's the kind of person Satan puts in a church. If he just put drug dealers in the church, we could spot them right away, right? That wouldn't be a problem if he just put murderers in here, or horrible sinners. He puts the nice ones in here. If you remember from last week, this was Judas's problem. Judas didn't betray Jesus because He was a drunk and on drugs. He did it because he was proud. He was just an angry guy, which is something we all need to keep in mind today.

Some of you guys remember, but when our church first started, our congregation sent me to the Grace Advance Academy in Los Angeles for some training on church planting. And when I was there, I asked one of the professors, "What's the greatest problem you see when you're starting a church?" And he said, "Power struggles." Proud people. That's a greatest problem when you church plant, because they're planted here by the devil. That's the mark of a tare.

And it brings us to another point to consider this morning, another way Satan messes with the church. And that is by being thorough. A third way that Satan messes with the church is by being thorough, and all this means he works very hard at it. He's very diligent. And if you look in verses 27 through 30, it says,

The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and [then we will take them out.]'"

Just to explain this a little bit, the ratio of tares to wheat must have been pretty high because they were enough to notice. You would think if there were just a few tares in the field, the slaves would not have bothered the master about it, but they did it because there were a lot of them. There were tares everywhere. And so his response is interesting because he says, "Don't go harvest the tares yet, for while you're gathering them up, you may uproot the wheat with them also."

There's a couple of reasons why he said that. For one, the roots of the tares and the wheat could have been so intermingled at this point, that if you pulled one up, both of them came out at the same time. So he told them not to do that. Leave them alone. Another reason is because some wheat grows slower than others. It takes longer to mature. You guys have gardens, you understand that. So if the slave pulled the tares up now, he might have pulled the wheat up by mistake, because again, you can't tell the difference. So he tells them not to do that. But whatever the case, Jesus says, this is how it'll be in the church age. The tares will stay among the wheat. The lost people will remain among the people of God until the final day. Because the devil just keeps putting them in here. That's the point of this section here. He just keeps putting them in the ground. It would be nice if at some point, he would get tired and quit. It'd be nice if he would just get discouraged. But he does. And he's so persistent.

And if you're tempted to be discouraged by this, let me remind you of what the parable is saying here. And that is that it's not your job to pull up the tares. Did you notice that? Verse 28, it says, "They said to him... an enemy has done this... Do you want us to go and pull them up?" But the Master said to them, "No, for while you're gathering the tares, you may uproot the wheat also. Allow both to grow together until harvest. And then we will deal with it at that time."

The word reap here—he mentions that, "I will say to the Reapers, first gather up the tares and bind them. But gather the wheat into my barn." And the word Reaper, it refers to someone who pulls the tares out of the ground. Today, we would do that with a combine, like you see out here on the farm. But back then they would do it with a sickle. It was a sharp, sharp curved blade that they would go with that was curved in the middle, and they would go around back and forth in the field and just kind of swing it. You guys have probably seen pictures of that

before. They would just knock it all down. Which is what the servants wanted to do here. They wanted to get their sickles out and go to work. But the master told them not to. Because it's not your job to do that. As Christians it's not your job to determine who is a wheat and who is a tare, who's saved and who's lost. It is your job to ask him to give a proper testimony of faith before they join the church. It is your job to call sin, sin and to call unbelief, unbelief. And to practice church discipline and to do all those types of things. But it's not your job to determine what's underneath the ground. That's God's job. That's his business. So you can take that off your shoulders and give it to him.

To say it another way, we are fruit inspectors; we're not root inspectors. Because you can look at the fruit. You can look at their works and their behavior and in their profession of faith, but you can't study their hearts. You can't go underneath the skin. You know, I don't know about you, but I read this, and it's a relief to me because there are people I have known for years who drive me crazy because I can't tell if they're saved or not. You guys know what I'm talking about? I have no idea. I'm a pastor, and I don't know. Because one minute they're living like they're Christian. The next minute, they're not. One moment, they're looking like the real thing. Everything looks great. Next moment, they're not. It's so confusing. The good news is that's okay. Because God can deal with it. I don't have to judge them for that. That's not my job. He's the Lord of the harvest. That's his job. I'll leave that up to him.

The discouraging part of this passage is that there's always going to be tares among the wheat in this life. But the encouraging part is that there's a day coming when God will deal with it. And I can just give that over to him. This really changes your perspective on the church doesn't it? Because it can be so easy to get judgmental when you come here and say, why doesn't everyone do what I do? Why don't they look like me? Why aren't they growing at the same rate I am? And there's a tendency to go in and start wanting to pull out your sickle and mow everybody down, right? Just go to work. Knock them all down. Jesus says you shouldn't do that here. There's another way to handle things in the church.

Which brings us to one more point to talk about this morning. Just to review these other ones, the first way that Satan messes with the church here is by putting seed in it. And secondly, he puts bad seeds. It's not just seed but it's evil seed. It's put in here to tear down the work of the church. Third, he is also very thorough in this. He doesn't mess around. He's just constantly sowing, sowing, sowing in here. Planting, planting, planting. It brings us to one more point though, and this is the encouraging part. One more way that Satan messes with the church. And that is by forgetting about the fact that God will one day put a stop to this.

One reason Satan keeps doing this and keeps acting this way is because he forgets about the fact that one day God will put an end to all his work. He won't go on forever. There will be a day of reckoning for the devil and his tares. So if you're ever discouraged by this, you can be encouraged by what you read here. If you look in verse 30, he says,

“Allow both to grow together until the harvest. And in the time of the harvest, I will say to the Reapers, ‘First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

As you read that, it's a little bit alarming because it's so abrupt. But in the first century, like it is today, farmers often got rid of their trash by burning it. They would just throw all the weeds into a pile in the backyard and light it on fire. In fact, in the first church I ever pastored I'll never forget the smell of burnt grass and burnt leaves. Because the people in the country would do that every fall. You would smell it everywhere you went, a pretty unpleasant smell. But here Jesus says that'll be the ultimate fate of the tares. They will be bound up in bundles, which means they'll be tied up so they can't get away, and they will be sent to hell. All this talk about burning here in verse 30 is a reference to hell, and the reason is, they haven't changed all throughout their lives. They stayed in the church. They kept praying and singing and reading their Bible and faking it. And as a result, a day came when God just took the mask off. And that's how the parable ends. I mean, as you read this, that's how it stops. You would think that after verse 31, Jesus would say something nice to kind of soften this a little bit. You would think

he might put John 3:16 in here or some kind of gospel presentation, but he doesn't. He just ends it like that for you to get the point that this is what will happen to you if you're a tare. You will be punished eternally in hell. You may play games with God in this life, but you won't do it in the next. You may trick people in this life, but you won't do that in the life to come. And in fact, if you want to look down at the explanation of this, down in verse 40, remember, this is what Jesus said about this parable as he explained it to his disciples. In verse 40, he says,

So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all stumbling blocks and those who commit lawlessness, and he will throw them into the furnace of fire. And in that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of the Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”

I wanted to read that to you again, because if you notice, there's several descriptions about hell in this passage. For one, it's a place of fire Jesus says, which was a reference to judgment, because fire consumes everything, just like the judgment of God. Nothing escapes a fire. Same idea here. And not only that, but it's also a furnace of fire, which means it's concentrated. The fire in a furnace is hotter than it is outside. And it's also inescapable. If you're in a furnace, you can't get out of the doors. He calls it a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, which is a reference to pain. Other scriptures say it's dark, because there is no light there. There's fire in hell, but it's not a lighting fire. It's a dark fire. Luke 16 says it's a place of great thirst. Revelation 14 says there's no rest there. Matthew five says it'll be bitter. But the point is that Jesus said so much about this because his audience was going there. He went into so much detail about this doctrine of hell because so many of his hearers were heading that way, and he was doing all he could to stop them. It says a lot about Jesus that he said so much about hell in the gospels. He talked about it, like, 70 times. And a huge portion of his parables are spent on this subject. Because as the son of God, he knew what hell was like. He knew how awful it was, and he wanted to tell people, you need to do all you can to avoid that dreadful place. You need to stay away from it.

It's been said that the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world that he doesn't exist. But I think the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world that hell doesn't exist. Because people don't believe in this doctrine anymore, do they? They don't talk about it. When's the last time you heard a sermon on hell, or went to a conference on hell? Or read about it, and in a book that wasn't silly? A book that didn't talk about 23 minutes in hell or something like that. And I think that's the case in the world today because so many people are going to hell right now. They just don't want to talk about this anymore. They're going to end up in the same place, and they want to avoid the subject. But we need to talk about it as a way of warning.

This is what you see if you look in church history, but oftentimes the subject of hell turned the church around. For instance, on July 8, 1741, in Connecticut, Jonathan Edwards preached what some considered to be the most famous sermon ever preached on American soil. It was called, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” And it was all about the topic of God's judgment, which the Lord used in an amazing way. By most accounts, Edwards was a pretty boring preacher, because he spoke in a monotone voice, and he would just stand behind the pulpit and read his notes. But when he preached this sermon, people were fainting and rolling in the aisles, begging God for mercy. They weren't speaking in tongues or giving prophecy, that kind of rolling in the aisles. They were torn up over their sin.

And just listen to what he said. Here's an excerpt from Jonathan Edwards' sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” He said, “There's nothing that keeps the wicked man out of hell at any one moment except the mere pleasure of God. And by mere pleasure of God, I mean his sovereign pleasure, his all-powerful will restrained by no obligation, hindered by no manner of difficulty. Nothing else but God's sovereign will has a hand in the preservation of wicked men. Your wickedness makes you as heavy as lead. It drives you down with great weight and pressure towards hell. And if God were to let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend, and plunge into the bottomless gulf. At that moment, you would see that your health, your own care and your prudence, your best contrivance, and all your righteousness have no more influence to hold you and keep you out

of hell than a spider's web has to keep you falling from a rock. The bow of God's wrath is bent. The arrow is made on a string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart and strains the bow. It is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow from being made drunk with your blood at any moment. You who remain in an unregenerate state, consider this, the fact that God will execute the fierceness of his anger implies that he will inflict wrath without any pity. When God beholds the unspeakable extremity of your condition and sees your torment to be so vastly disproportional to your strength and how your poor soul is crushed and sinks down as it were, into an infinite gloom, he will have no compassion upon you. He will not hold back the executions of his wrath or in the least lighten his hand. There will be no moderation or mercy, nor will God then at all stay his rough wind. He will have no regard for your welfare, nor will he be at all concerned about your increasing suffering, except that you will not suffer beyond what justice requires.”

That’s a frightening thing to read, isn’t it? And he went on and on like that for over an hour. But those words changed the world of Edwards’ day because it drove people back to Christ. They heard about this place called hell, and they didn’t want to go there. And so they did everything they could to get right with God. And I would say, I wonder if there’s any here who need to do the same thing today. Because you’ve come to church for years. You’ve been a “Christian” all your life. But if you’re honest about it, hell scares you because you know you’re going there. It terrifies you because, like most of the people in Jesus’ day, you’ve just been faking it. And if that’s the case, I want to encourage you, it doesn’t have to be that way. God will save your sin if you just ask him to. Friends, you’ve broken God’s law, you’ve failed him, and you should go to hell for it. But Jesus was crucified in order to save you. He went to the cross in order to take your place. So you can be forgiven if you just believe in him now, for the first time.

The secular author Marghanita Laski once said, “The one thing I envy about Christians is your forgiveness.” She said, “I have no one to forgive me.” Friends, you do. You have someone to forgive you. His name is Jesus Christ. Would you come to him today, if you haven’t already? Let me close us in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you this morning that we have someone to forgive us of our sins, and we have someone that will pardon us of all our iniquities even if we have been a tare all our lives. Oh Lord, we thank you that you’re a gracious God who pardons the worst of sins, and the worst of sins probably we should be hypocrisy. It’s so common among us today. And yet you are a God who even calls hypocrites back to himself. So, Lord, I do pray for those who are here this morning. If there are some who have not trusted in Christ, like we’ve been talking about, this would break their hearts. Father, we thank you for the church, even though it is a messy place, and it’s difficult and there’s all kinds of conflict. It’s your church. These are your people. And we’ve been called to be faithful to them. And Lord, I thank you for the ones who have joined us today. I do pray for them as well, as we already have. I pray that there would be more to come, but in the meantime, I pray you would help us to shepherd them grow closer to one another. Lord, I pray there would be more wheat in the fields as time goes on here in Chilliwack. I pray more and more would come to the Savior and be part of the kingdom. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.