Subversive Peace — Delivery Transcript

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, December 10, 2023 · *Advent 2023*

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Alright, thank you, Russell and choir and Mary and team for leading us in worship. If you have your Bible, you can open it up to the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 13. And as you're turning there, I want you to imagine that your childhood was not the childhood you had, but you were living in the first century, maybe even a couple of decades before the first century or the dawn of the first century and you've got a childhood that is shaped by growing up in Sunday school—they didn't call it Sunday school back then; they called it going to the temple.

And you heard Sunday school stories about how special the Jewish people were because of God's calling of Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans, because of the forming of Israel. Jacob wrestling with God; God's faithfulness to his people; stories about Joseph and Daniel in the lions' den. And all the greats that you remember from your own childhood. You think about King David and his amazing rule and reign of Israel during his heyday. King Solomon, the building of the temple, even guys like Saul—maybe not a great, perfect king, but a king nonetheless.

In your mind, this nation that you're a part of, this people that you're a part of, has a special relationship with God. God has done unique and amazing things through that people, things like the miraculous liberation from slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt. And all of that in that background is in conflict with your present experience because you are under the oppression of a government. That mocks your religion and thinks nothing of your God. They belittle you, they abuse you, mistreat you, and your daily experience is one of great misery because of the authoritarian government that you're under.

That was the context of the original audience for Jesus when he came on the scene preaching and teaching. Jesus was a Jewish man, so his audience was predominantly a Jewish

audience. What they wanted more than anything else is the same kinds of things that we want in our day and age, and that is peace. And they thought, like many of us think, the only way for us to get peace is to get rid of these oppressors. To overthrow the Roman government, to have some kind of political solution. And because of the Old Testament prophecies about someone who would come and crush the head of the serpent and liberate God's people from their oppression.

They were eagerly anticipating this figure known as the Christ, the Messiah, who would come and do everything that the Old Testament said that he would do. And there were groups that were cropping up along the way because of the oppression of the Roman government and because of the delay of the Messiah, groups like the zealots who said, we'll just take matters into our own hands. And we'll have our own little counteroffensive and do to the Romans what they need done. And then you had little messiahs cropping up all over the place saying, "Well, I'm the one, I'm the anointed one, I'm the prophesied Messiah of the Old Testament."

And they would prove to be frauds and phonies and fakes. And then Jesus comes on the scene. And when Jesus comes on the scene, he perks people's ears up because he says things like, "The time is at hand. The kingdom of God has come near." And everyone was eagerly anticipating the kingdom. They were waiting for the Messiah who was going to make that announcement. And overthrow the oppressors like the Roman government. But when he made that statement, Mark chapter 1 is an example of this, the time is at hand, the kingdom of God has come near, here's what we need to do—do we need to rally, get our swords, overthrow the Romans?

He didn't say that. He said you need to repent: "Repent and believe the good news." And then he would say things like, love your enemies, do good to those who curse you. And then when he would teach and preach about the nature of the kingdom, he would say things like, you can have peace. Peace that surpasses understanding. You can have joy, you can have contentment, you can have life and life abundant, but you can have it now, even in the midst of this oppression. Even in the midst of these difficulties and hardships, because the kingdom of God is now.

But it's also not yet. There's this fullness of the kingdom that is yet to come, but you can receive the gift of the kingdom even now as we wait for that final realization. And you can imagine that for the original audience of Jesus, this was good news for many of them. Welcome—they were ready to receive it, but it was also frustrating news for others because the peace of the kingdom of God and the hope of the kingdom of God did not quite look like what they thought it was going to look like.

For Jesus, it's in this already-not-yet tension. That's how a lot of theologians describe the kingdom of God today: it's in an already-not-yet tension. If you want the peace that

surpasses human understanding, the peace of Advent is a subversive peace. Now to subvert something means to overthrow it, to take the existing order and to tear it down and replace it with something new. And that's ultimately what the kingdom of God does, but it does it through means that are a little bit surprising and unconventional, and that's what our parable is going to be about this morning in Matthew 13.

And all the parables in Matthew 13 are subversive. It's all about the kingdom of God and how the kingdom of God operates, but it doesn't operate according to the values of this world or the rules of this world. It does so differently according to the values of the kingdom of God. Last week we looked at the kingdom hope that we have in Advent. This week we're going to look at the kingdom peace. We're going to pick it up in Matthew 13, starting in verse 24: 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 people were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and left. And when the plants sprouted and produced grain, then the weeds also appeared. The landowner's servants came to him and said, "Master, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Then where did the weeds come from?" And the master told them, "An enemy did this." So they say to the master, "Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?" And he says, "No. When you pull up the weeds, you might also uproot the wheat with them.

Instead, let both grow together until the harvest. And at harvest time I'll tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first, and tie them in bundles to burn them, but collect the wheat into my barn." Now, Jesus is telling a parable somewhat similar to the first parable we looked at last week, which is the parable of the four different types of soil. Except this parable isn't ultimately about soil. This parable is ultimately about seeds. There were four soils in the last parable; in this parable there's only two, but there's two different types of seeds.

You've got the good seed that the farmer plants, the farmer who owns the field, but then you've got another farmer—a negative farmer, an enemy farmer—and he plants a different kind of seed, a bad seed, and it produces weeds. And a lot of the people who study this text and associate it with the cultural background of the day say that it was a specific kind of wheat called darnel wheat. And darnel wheat was a kind of wheat that looked very similar to regular wheat, except it wasn't regular wheat. It was a weed, and like most weeds it would begin to zap up the moisture and the nutrients around the existing life adjacent.

So you can kind of see this is just a Google image of darnel wheat right next to real wheat. You can see the real wheat when it gets mature it turns brown, but the darnel wheat doesn't turn colors; it remains kind of blackish. But early on in the process you can hardly tell the difference between the two. And that's what Jesus is saying in this parable. It's hard to tell at this stage, and so you need to let both of them grow together until the harvest, and then I'll have my reapers come and distinguish between the two.

That's the basic gist of the parable, and then he gives the explanation later on. One of the things that's unique about Jesus when he would teach parables, he would give the parable to everybody and then secretly he would give an explanation to his disciples. And so when he left the crowds, this is in verse 36, he goes into the house and his disciples approach him and say, "You got to tell us what you meant by that parable. Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." And so Jesus replied, the one who sows the good seed is the Son of man, the field is the world, and the good seed—these are the children of the kingdom, and the weeds are the children of the evil one.

And the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of man will send out his angels. And they will gather from his kingdom all who cause sin and those guilty of lawlessness, and they will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Father's kingdom.

Let anyone who has ears listen. So before we get into the meaning of the parable and the implications and applications of the parable, I just want to kind of help get the lay of the land because Jesus is comprehensive in his defining of what this parable means. I've got a little chart here to give you the main characters. You got the farmer who Jesus says is the Son of man. He's pulling all of this language from Daniel chapter 7, by the way, if you want to know about the angels and the harvest and the fire and all the stuff shining like the sun.

All that's from Daniel chapter seven. And Jesus is equating himself with that Son of man. He's the farmer. The field is the world. Not the church, the world. The wheat is God's kids, the weeds are the devil's kids, and the enemy is the devil. The harvesters are the angels, the harvest is the end of the age, and the furnace is hell. So essentially what Jesus is saying is that the Son of man has come into the world; the kingdom has come. He has planted the seed, and his seed is good seed.

And so Jesus has gone around, he's been preaching the gospel, it's been landing in certain good soil, and that good soil has received the gospel, and they've become children of God, and those children of God are growing. But at the same time there's an enemy in this world, and that enemy also has a seed, and that seed is a counterfeit of the true gospel, and as that seed is scattered in the world, it also falls on certain types of soil, and that soil receives it and they begin to grow not in righteousness and glory of the kingdom, but they begin to grow in a counter resistance, a sinfulness, and a causing of others to sin.

And those two things are growing together in this world, Jesus says, until the end of days when the Son of man is going to tell his angels to go separate the wheat from the tares. God's children are going to shine like the sun, and Satan's children are going to be tormented eternally in a place that we might call hell. Until that day, Jesus says you need to let the two

—wheat and weeds—grow together. You need to be patient. And so, really, the story of the world today is a story of two kingdoms.

It's a war of two kingdoms. You've got the kingdom of God, which has come with the coming of Jesus Christ, but you've also got alongside the kingdom of God the kingdom of the evil one, the prince of the power of the air, the devil who is given authority in this world to wreak havoc and cause harm and tempt people to kill, steal and destroy. And those two things are operating even today simultaneously in this already not yet tension. And so how is it that you can have peace in the midst of that kind of a world?

How can you have kingdom peace? Peace that surpasses human understanding. Peace that, even though there's difficulties and hardships and evil, doesn't dissuade you from your joy in the Lord or your contentment in Christ. I think you see three different ways in this passage, and I'm going to go through all three and then we'll wrap up with some application points. If you want them all up front just so you can take the notes and not have to worry about writing things down, the first is to be aware of the king's enemy.

The second is to agree with the king's patience, and the third is to anticipate the king's judgment. All three of these are directly pulled from Jesus' parable about the wheat and the weeds. First, be aware of the king's enemy. I think it's so fascinating when this parable is told, the master has these servants, and the question out of the servants when they see the weeds is, what are these doing here? Aren't you a good farmer? Isn't this your field? How could you—what are you thinking? Growing weeds in your yard? And I find that funny today if the question was going to be raised not about agriculture and seeds, but about God himself, people might say, well, if God is so good and God is so powerful, then why is there evil and suffering in the world?

Philosophers call this the theodicy. If God is good and he's all powerful, then why evil? And it's a powerful argument against the existence of God and many unbelieving people, skeptical people are sympathetic to this argument and distance themselves from the truth of Christianity because of the reality of evil in the world. Maybe you have loved ones, sons or daughters, or even yourself struggle with believing in the goodness of God given the evil that's in the world. And Jesus gives an answer to that problem, but before we look at that answer, I just want to acknowledge that this problem of evil is a problem for everybody.

It doesn't matter who you are, the problem of evil is a problem for you because you live in the world. It doesn't matter what you believe about the world. The fact is you live in the world, and when you live in the world, you've got to deal with the evil of the world, and everybody has to do it. Atheists give an answer to the problem of evil by saying there is no God. Agnostics give an answer by saying if there is a God, he doesn't care about this. The Eastern religions like Taoism and Hinduism say that there is a God and there is a goodness to that God, but there's also an equal counterbalancing evil in the world.

And that evil and good need to coexist in tension with each other and they balance out the universe. Then you've got religions like Buddhism that says, yeah, evil is here and suffering is inescapable, but you can overcome it through enlightenment and nirvana. But Christianity comes and says, no, those are not the right answers to the problem of evil. Yes, it is real, but God is good, and the source of evil, if you pull the thread long enough. Culminates in Genesis 3 in the Garden of Eden with the serpent and his seed.

The truth is God is good, but God in creating this world created people with free agency. He created a world in which creatures could love each other and love their creator, but in giving them the capacity to love, you must give someone the choice to love, and in giving them the choice to love, they use that freedom. To choose wrongly. And when they chose wrongly, they brought sin into the world. And you see that first with Satan and his fall prior to the Garden of Eden. And then you see it in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve choosing to reject God's design and choose Satan's counterfeit and as a result of that choice sin entered the world.

And all of the evil that's in the world is not all necessarily a direct result of your choices, but the choices of generations and generations and generations of people choosing wrongly, further violating God's design for this world, further breaking the world in its current state, so the brokenness grows and our suffering grows as a result of the serpent and his seed. And Jesus is saying, if you realize that it will help you have a little bit of peace in this world. You will not be so surprised by the existence of weeds because you will know an enemy did this.

It wasn't me. It was an enemy. And I think for us this morning, there are certain things that you can see from this parable about the nature of our enemy that will give you greater and greater levels of peace. Number one, the enemy is personal. He's not some inanimate force like the dark side in Star Wars, this force you can tap into. That's not the Christian understanding of evil. Evil has a name. And his name is the devil, his name is Satan, his name is Lucifer. And when you think of evil as a person, when you think of it as embodied, if you will, not necessarily physically, but with agency, it changes the way you deal with evil.

You begin to resist it like you would resist a person. You begin to not flirt with it just like you would not flirt with someone who is not your wife because there's a power in that agency of the evil one. The enemy in this parable is also strategic. You notice when he comes, he comes when everybody's asleep. Now some people make much of that. People were sleeping. We need to wake up and not be sleeping. Everybody's got to sleep eventually. Amen. You've been working in the yard all day, what are you going to do when you go to bed?

You're going to sleep, everybody sleeps. The point is not that the people are sleeping, the point is that he comes when we're sleeping. He comes in an opportune time to tempt, and he's strategic. He masquerades as an angel of light, 2 Corinthians says. He is like a lion prowling, seeking someone to devour. Paul, when he wrote to the Ephesians, he says, you've

got to stand firm in the armor of God because there are schemes of the evil one. He is thoughtful in his methods. He says the same thing to the church in Corinth in his second letter.

We're not unaware of his methods. Satan is personal, he is strategic, and he is finally scattered everywhere. Wherever the wheat was growing, so also were the weeds growing. There are no safe spaces, you might say, in this world. Every part of this world, every—what's the word I'm looking for? I can't think of it. Every sphere of your life, whether it's a material sphere or an immaterial sphere, whether it's relational or corporate or financial, or spiritual, there is a counter-resistance. There is God's design, and there is Satan's counterfeit. And Satan's counterfeit is trying to make advances in every arena of our lives.

And we cannot pretend as if there are any safe spaces, even in the church. Even in the church, Paul says there are going to be wolves that rise up and teach people the wrong things. You've got to be on your guard always. Because he's scattered everywhere. His children are scattered everywhere. And when you are aware of that, it gives you greater peace. It gives you greater peace because you're not surprised by the suffering that you experience in this world. When you experience brokenness in this world, it is sad. It is sometimes tragically so.

But it is not an opportunity for you to say, God, are you good? Or God, do you see? Of course he's good and of course he sees, but it's the reality of his choosing to create a world in this way. So you're no longer surprised. And really the greater awareness you have of this evil one, the greater awareness you have of his schemes and methods, the greater levels of peace you'll begin to experience in this world. Not because knowing it protects you from it, but in knowing it and understanding it, you have a weapon against it.

You have strategies in how to pray and guard yourselves from the schemes of the evil one. Don't become a soft target for the enemy. Number two, you've got to agree with the king's patience. This is in verses 28 to 30. They ask the master, well, if the enemy's done this, let's go and let's pull up the weeds. We can take care of it right now. And the master says, "No, I don't want you to do that right now. If you do that right now, you're going to uproot the wheat with the weeds.

You need to instead let both grow until the harvest. And then at the harvest I'll get the reapers to do what needs to be done." This is the natural inclination of all of us. This was what Israel was wanting to do with Rome. Look at these pagan Romans. Look at what they're trying to do to us. Let's get rid of them. Let's get the zealots to get their game plan together and take care of this problem. And Jesus is saying that's not the way the kingdom works. You've got to let them both grow together.

You've got to be patient. If you had weeds in your yard, your natural inclination would be to go and pull the weeds. But Jesus is saying in the kingdom you can't do it that way for two reasons. Number one, it's not their time. And number two, it's not your role. It's not their time. You see that little word until? You've got to wait until the harvest. For whatever reason in God's wisdom there is a season between Jesus dealing decisively with the problem of evil and the reality of Satan and Jesus completing what he finished on the cross at the second coming.

And there is this age, some call it the church age, you can call it whatever you want to call it. But there's this meantime where God is letting both grow together. Why does he let both grow together? Well, on the one hand, 2 Peter chapter 3 says he's doing this because he's not willing that anyone perish. He loves his creation. He has people who are yet to believe. He has people who have yet to be redeemed. And so he's not slow in fulfilling his promises. It's not as though evil doesn't need to be dealt with.

It's not as though God is blind to the sufferings and injustices in this world. He's not blind. He's just delaying. He's just waiting because he's not wanting any to perish. The second reason we wait is because you can't really know for sure until the proper time. Just like that darnel wheat. A lot of times it looks the same. And when you go pulling out all the weeds thinking you're doing God's work, you may unintentionally be pulling out some of the wheat as well. And you don't have to look far in church history to see this.

You've got the crusades of the 12th and 13th century, or whenever they were, I think it was 12th and 13th. I might be displaying my ignorance here, I don't know. Horrific, what happens when the church abuses political power to bring about God's kingdom prematurely through their methods instead of the Lord Jesus Christ's. It's not our time, it's not their time, and it's not our role. Jesus said it's not for you to decide. A lot of people preach this as if it's in the church and say, well, in the church you've got believers, true believers, and non-believers.

Or they would say, you got true believers and you got professing believers that are not real believers, and we just need to leave them alone. And it's not us, it's not our place to judge. And that is not what this parable is about. It's not about discipleship. Why? Because the field is not the church. What is the field? Field is the world. So Jesus is talking about believers and unbelievers in the world, not believers and professing believers that are fake in the church. When Paul talked about discipleship in the church, he says you do judge the brother who says he's a brother but lives as if he isn't.

He says, you've got to get rid of that person who professes to be a Christian but isn't living like a Christian. He's going to contaminate the whole lump. So Jesus is not talking here about people who profess to be a Christian but are not. He's talking about people who don't profess to be Christians but who live in the world alongside of you, and he's saying you've got

to learn to be patient, just like the king is patient with that evil in the world. It's not to say you celebrate it; it's not to say you endorse it; it's not to say that you're happy about it.

It's just to say you agree with the king in how he decides to wait until the day of judgment, which is the third thing. Anticipate the king's judgment. Notice that little phrase there in verse 30: Let both grow together until the harvest. At the harvest time, I will tell the reapers." There is a harvest that is coming. I love that phrase. Until the harvest—there will come a day where Jesus will return, and the angels will go to and fro throughout all the earth and reap the harvest. Revelation, the book of Revelation talks about this.

I can remember it vividly because we went through the whole book together. Do y'all remember chapter 14? The angels go to and fro throughout the earth. One like the Son of Man has a sickle, and an angel says to him, go and reap. And he reaps the harvest.[1] And I think that's a harvest of righteousness. That's the harvest of the redeemed. It's the harvest of the gospel being preached and people responding to the gospel and this great revival that is going to precede the second coming of Jesus Christ. Even as the world gets worse and worse and worse and more and more persecution, the church is going to shine brighter and brighter and brighter as the angels reap the harvest.

But then after that there will be a second harvest, a harvest of judgment. The harvest where he gets the grapes and he stomps on the grapes and blood flows for miles and miles and miles. And Jesus returns and executes justice. The future justice that will be brought on the world is what gives us peace in the present. Now a lot of people read Matthew 13, verses 41 to 43. Let's read it together again. The Son of man will send out his angels. They will gather from his kingdom all who cause sin, the guilty, the lawless.

They will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, and then the righteous will shine like the sun in their father's kingdom. People will read this—it's a passage about hell— and they'll say, how could a loving God send people to hell? How could a loving God torture people eternally? And that is certainly one way to read this passage, but I don't think it's the right way to read the passage. Remember, this is a farmer who has a field. And if a farmer is a good farmer, just like if a judge is a just judge, he will not let evil go unpunished.

There has to be atonement; some price has to be paid for evil in the world. And if God is a loving God, and if God is a just God, then He will make right what has been wronged. And that's what this passage is about. And so God's judgment does not come from a place of vindication or rage or petty jealousy. His judgment flows from his love. There is no contradiction between God's wrath and God's mercy. And if you ever question that or if you ever wonder why is God so patient, what gives him the right to delay and delay and delay, he has dealt decisively with the unrighteousness in this world through the death of Jesus on the cross.

At the cross you actually see God's perfect righteousness, his perfect justice. In tandem with his mercy and his grace, both poured out together on the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus absorbing the penalty of God's wrath. He's bearing the weight of our sin. He who knew no sin became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God and simultaneously you see God's mercy and grace in that someone who did not deserve to die replaced us. He stood in our place for our sins. And because that event took place in history, now God is patiently delaying judgment so that more and more people might behold what took place on the cross and repent and be saved.

But that day will come to an end, and judgment will eventually come. And so what is today? Today is a season of forgiveness. That was one of the most amazing insights for me this week whenever I was studying. That phrase in Matthew chapter 13, verse 30, where it says, let both grow together. That Greek word translated let is the Greek word for forgiveness. Forgive. Allow. Let it go. This season that we're in right now—the reason we can have peace in the midst of turmoil and chaos is because this season is a season of forgiveness.

Because of what Christ has accomplished on the cross, there is now an invitation given, even to the weeds, to repent and be saved. They can repent and be transformed from a weed into wheat. And the way we have peace in our world today is not by amassing political power, not that there's something wrong with that, but that's not the final solution. It's not by retribution and vengeance. The Lord says, those things are mine, I will repay. The way that we advance against the kingdom of darkness in our world is through the values of our king.

It's through things like love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and gentleness and self-control. The virtues of the kingdom, the values of our king are what advance against the darkness in our world. And so as we anticipate the king's judgment, we anticipate it in that way. We choose to forgive. And we choose to take advantage of God's forgiveness of us in Christ. And when you receive that forgiveness into your life, you will possess a peace that surpasses human understanding. The peace that the angels announced to Mary or the shepherds in our passage this morning.

And that's how we'll subvert the evil in our world. The kingdom of Christ advances through humble love, not violent force. There will come a day where Jesus will use force in this world, and it will be bloody. But that's not our war to fight. In fact, in the book of Revelation, if you want to go back there, Jesus does all the fighting, and we just sit back on the horses and watch. Our job today is not to fight. It's not vengeance. It's peace. And we receive that peace in the same way that God released that peace into the world, and it's through forgiveness.

And so I wonder if there are any relationships in your life this morning that need the peace of Jesus to guard and preserve where chaos and turmoil used to be. Maybe there are some of you here this morning who haven't received the peace of God that's available to you in Jesus

Christ. And your life is marked by chaos and turmoil. And this morning the Lord is saying to you, I've made it possible today. Before the end comes, I've made it possible today for you to receive peace that surpasses human understanding.

And it's available if you'll repent of your sins and put your faith in Jesus Christ. Turn from the values of this world, turn from the counterfeit of the evil one, and turn to the blueprint, the truth of Christ and his gospel. And if you've not made that decision, I would encourage you this morning as Mary comes and leads us through a time of invitation to make that choice. And you can come down to the front and make it public. You can choose to be baptized as an external demonstration of that faith.

I also want to challenge those of you who are here this morning who are Christians to be reminded that the peace of Advent is available to us today through forgiveness. And it might be that you've been living in sin and you've been maybe presuming upon the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. And this morning you need to be reminded of his love for you, of his patience towards you. But also not just towards you, but towards those who have yet to believe. And the people in your life who have offended you, grieved you, upset you.

There's an opportunity for you to grant the peace to them that you've received from your Heavenly Father. Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And so if there's someone you need to forgive this morning as the Holy Spirit leads, it's not my place to tell you what or who or where, but you allow the Lord to minister to your heart during this time of response and do what the Lord leads you to do.

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "One angel has a sickle, and Jesus says to the angel, go and reap. And that angel reaps the harvest." In Revelation 14 the sickle is held by "one like the Son of Man" seated on the cloud; an angel comes out of the temple and calls on him, "Use your sickle and reap," and he harvests the earth. (A second angel with a sickle then gathers the grapes of wrath, vv. 17–20.) Source: Revelation 14:14–20 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩