

Proper 11

July 19, 2026

Isaiah 44: 6-8

Romans 8: 18-27

Matthew 13: 24-30; 36-43

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The parable today is about the end, but it resembles the beginning. The parable today is about God's work in the world, His grace for mankind, and His patience in the unfolding plan. The parable is about the end, but it is also about the beginning. One of the challenges that I often hear people make to the existence of God is that there is much evil in the world, so how can someone believe in God? The classic argument predates Jesus by a couple hundred years. With regard to the existence of evil, Epicurus posed his challenge this way:

1. God is willing to prevent evil, but He is not able, therefore God is not omnipotent.
 - a. We do believe God is willing and able to prevent evil, but we believe He self-limits out of concern for His creation. God allows evil, even in His omnipotence. His intervention outside of His Son would be catastrophic. No one should be clamoring for another flood.
2. God is able but not willing to prevent evil, therefore, He is malevolent.
 - a. It is not malevolent to endure suffering for the sake of a greater good. Paul tells us the whole creation is groaning as if in labor waiting for the revealing of the sons of God. Nor is it malevolent if God suffers with us and sustains us in our strife.
3. God is both willing and able, in which case, why does evil exist?
 - a. The only "evil" we can really speak to is the result of being created with free will. The question of suffering in the world is actually more difficult, but evil is due to creatures willfully acting against the goodness of God.
4. God is neither willing or able, so then why call Him God?
 - a. We believe God is both willing and able to bring evil to an end. He does not do so out of concern for creation. The weeds, as pernicious as they are, will not prevail. God perseveres and endures this, so we must as well.

The challenge of the Epicurean paradox has persisted for two-thousand years, so there must be something compelling about it. I still hear it echoed today in statements such as, "If there is a God, then why do bad things happen?" We should not be quick to dismiss this challenge, for it is not only the unfaithful who question God's inaction in the world. The prophet Habakkuk cried out:

"Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is paralyzed, and justice

never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.”¹
The Psalmist, Asaph questioned if God simply forgot His steadfast love for His people and shut the door of His compassion.² And David sighed in a moment of anguish:

“How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?”³

By framing the parable of the weeds in terms of creation and the end of the age, we can see how God works in the world in mercy and patience. We can also understand that what is asked of us is trust, humility and patience. Like the prophets, we will not stop our discourse with a desperate cry, but with resilient belief in the goodness of God. “Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.”⁴

When God created the world, He made it well, meaning that He made things to be good. However, being good Himself, He extended to man the gift of a will that could choose to act in ways that are counter to His goodness. A will to act is not exclusive to man, as there are other beings made by God that have a will of their own. Sadly, this will can be bent toward evil. In the midst of the good garden, an enemy of its own will sowed the seed of temptation that would appeal to man’s will to power; the will not just to live in a good paradise, but to rule the paradise in place of God. Men are prone to thinking that they can do better than God. The roots of this end time parable extend to that moment, and ever since, humans have been asking questions about the inevitable tension – how does a good God create a world while allowing for evil, and in which evil has always appeared to be a present reality? The parable today not only paints a picture of the final judgment, it teaches us that evil is not God’s will, and it will not be allowed to destroy His plan.

What else can we discern from this parable and what Jesus is teaching through it? First, we have to learn to trust in God even when our fear is that we are losing ground. It is a popular notion to believe that the Church is in decline simply because Christians in America no longer enjoy the social, cultural, and political sway they once did. There are many books about the decline of Christianity. Here are some sample titles: *Life in the Negative World – Confronting Challenges in an Anti-Christian Culture*⁵; *Post-Christian – A Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*⁶; *Youth Ministry in a Post-Christian World*⁷; and I could list dozens more. There is nothing post-Christian about the world. There are more Christians in the world today than at any point in history. Christians frequently miss this reality because they haven’t grasped that the center of

¹ Habakkuk 1:3-4

² Psalm 77:8-9

³ Psalm 13:1-2

⁴ Habakkuk 3:17-18

⁵ Arron Renn, *Life in the Negative World – Confronting Challenges in an Anti-Christian Culture*. 2024. Zondervan.

⁶ Gene Edward Veith Jr., *Post Christian – A Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*. 2020. Crossway.

⁷ Brock Morgan & Chap Clark, *Youth Ministry in a Post Christian World – A Hopeful Wakeup Call*. 2013. Youth Cartel.

Christianity has shifted. But Christ has not shifted as the center of all things, and His followers are as robust as ever. Africa is the continent with the most Christians today, and this is only because in 2014, it overtook South America.

What has many Christians I talk to in a panic is really just a demographic shift: in 1900, 82% of Christians were in North America and Europe. Now, it is 33%. The change is due to the radical growth of Christianity in the global south where 67% of Christians now live. These figures would be even more lopsided if America did not have an influx of Christians from Latin America.⁸ It is as if many Christians in America are questioning God, not because of weeds that have sprung up, but because they are concerned about where the wheat is growing. Stop fretting. The Son of Man is sowing good seed in the world. We need to trust that He is doing this. We need only focus on being what He has called us to be and doing what He has called us to do. The results are in His hands.

As for the culture, Jesus and His teachings have always been counter-cultural – counter to the overly legalistic Shammai Pharisees, counter to the Aristotelian Greeks, and counter to the Roman Stoics, though there are aspects of each of these that are consistent with a Christian framework. Today, the situation remains the same – Jesus and His teachings run counter to what appeals to many people. We should not be surprised to find this happening in our midst, and we should trust that God is working through all this.

Second, from this parable we can learn that Jesus is teaching us about humility. The Church is being made into what God wants it to be. We will not always be able to tell the wheat from the weeds, though the time is coming when this will be revealed. And it can be concerning to sense the deep roots that the sons of the evil one have driven into the soil. However, those roots have always been there. It is just that at this late age, the weeds are declaring themselves to be so. Western countries used to claim 90% plus Christian populations, but I suspect the actual percentage was lower. Declaring yourself to be otherwise was a riskier proposition in those days, but the roots were well established. Then as now, the temptation is to destroy the weeds as if we know better than the Master what the remedy is for His creation. An overly aggressive response puts the good crop at risk and jeopardizes the harvest. And too many Christians are nervous, like the servants who want to gather the weeds. If you gather too soon, you will not be able to tell the wheat from the weeds, so you not only risk damaging the wheat due to intertwined roots, you risk mistaking weeds for wheat and pulling up the good seeds. So, we must be humble enough to recognize our ignorance. We cannot always tell the weeds from the wheat. Nor can we know what God is doing to turn weeds into wheat.

This brings us to the third thing we can learn from Jesus' teaching in this parable. We must learn patience and resilience in the face of the weeds that are growing. There are several reasons for this. First, we have all exhibited weed-like behavior, and some of us were firmly rooted in the weed camp of rebellion against God, selfish ambition, disregard of the oppressed and the outcast,

⁸ Gina Zurlo & Todd Johnson. *Is Christianity Shrinking or Shifting?* <https://lausanne.org/global-analysis/is-christianity-shrinking-or-shifting>

and failure to use God's gifts to us for His glory. I am sure that someday, though you are wheat, you resemble the weeds. Second, you may have even been a weed, but God worked to redeem you and remake you in His Son's resurrected image. Lastly, we have to be patient because God is allowing this growth and transformation to take place throughout the world, even if we feel that we are losing ground to the weeds in the West.

Too often, the attitude of the Christian is like Adam in the garden. You think you can be a better ruler of the garden than God is. This stems from the belief that God isn't able to stop evil, so you must. You see how the weeds threaten to choke out the wheat, and you say, "Someone should do something! We can't let the enemy get away with this! The good seed will fail if we don't do something. There is work to do, so let me get to tearing out those weeds." Historically, such impatience and the desire to make the world into what men desire it to be has led confessing Christians to commit evil acts in the name of God. We are to follow a peaceful path in keeping with the King of Peace.

The parable asks us to trust in God, even when we think He should do something different from what we see happening. We are also expected to remain humble rather than jumping to our conclusions about the world around us. Lastly, we are to endure patiently as the end approaches. And all of this is to give us greater peace in the world, over and against the fear-mongering and crisis peddling that confronts us. Christ is sowing His good seed and the crop is growing. The weeds will not prevail, though they attempt to disrupt the roots of the wheat and consume its resources. But we have food that the weeds cannot comprehend. Rather than pushing to conform the world to our will, our food is to do the will of the one who calls us to be His wheat. And the food He feeds us is a reflection of the work He does in the world and the coming harvest. He gathers the wheat with which He feeds us from His table. He sustains us with His blood, under the wine, which is crafted from the grapes spread across the hills. The ingathering is coming. We have only to be patient, to stand firm, and we will see the salvation of our God.⁹

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

⁹ Exodus 14:13