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Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43
DON'T GET IMPATIENT! GOD IS STILL IN CHARGE!

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Every day I wake up and thank the Lord for his many blessings in my life. I thank him for graciously making it through the night. Then I ask, "Today? Today, Lord? This would be a wonderful time for you to return!" Then I usually go and turn on the news. My prayer is intensified as I look at the horrible things going on in the world. Murders, rioting, stealing, disrespect for authority, terrorism, things so evil that they seem unimaginable, especially when there are children involved. There are times when I simply cry.

I know that I'm not alone. I know that you feel that way as well. We know what the world thinks of Jesus and his followers. We know that Satan is truly alive and well, urging people to follow their own sinful desires and telling them that there is no God. We know that people believe Satan. We also know that at times, we are tempted to join everyone else in their wickedness and rebellion.

Wouldn't it be great if there were no unbelievers? Wouldn't it be great if all the enemies of the gospel were wiped out overnight? God could do it in any number of ways. He could strike them down with a plague. We had one going around in the world a couple years ago. What if it only worked on unbelievers? He could cause the earth to swallow them up. He could rain down fire from heaven. There are many things that God could do to his enemies. And if God doesn't want to do that, maybe we could move things along. Maybe the Church could do its part to rid this world of the evil that befalls it. It is tempting to think that God just might want us to take matters into our own hands.

As we look at our Gospel reading this morning, it is very clear that God does not want us to do that. He is going to remind us that he is still in charge. This world is his. All things will happen according to his plan, and they will ultimately serve for our good, even if we don't understand God's purpose at the time. DON'T GET IMPATIENT! GOD IS STILL IN CHARGE!

In this section of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is going to preach in parables. He will tell truths about the kingdom of God in stories that people may or may not understand. Some will pick up on what he is teaching while others are totally lost. The story of the wheat and the weeds will be told to all. The disciples will have the key. When Jesus teaches about the kingdom of God, we want to make sure that he is not talking about a particular place, but rather an activity. When our Lord Jesus came into this world of sin, God would begin to restore his fallen creation. Sins would be forgiven, people would be healed of various diseases of body and soul, and they would learn more about God's plan of salvation that would culminate with the crucifixion of our Lord and his resurrection from the dead.

The people wanted more than that. They wanted power and glory. They wanted the Romans taken out of the picture. They wanted the kingdom of Israel to be restored to the glory days of David and Solomon. They wanted to be the envy of the world. Jesus' ministry, although filled with miraculous signs, wasn't enough. It did not meet their expectations.

Now when Jesus explains the parable to his disciples, he lets them know that things will be different someday. Things will change dramatically, but for now, this is what they would see and experience. They should be content that the Lord is in charge, even if it didn't seem that way to their human senses.

We can understand how the disciples felt. Things really didn't look that good. The religious leaders had set themselves against Jesus and some wanted to kill him. Many people failed to repent as Jesus preached to them. Jesus was not living up to the crowds' expectations. Jesus would be rejected in his hometown of Nazareth and John the Baptist would be beheaded by King Herod. The disciples were getting more and more impatient. They are still with Jesus but staying with Jesus is getting harder and harder to do.

Jesus is going to assure them that God is still in charge and that following our Lord is still the right thing to do. The time will come when everything will be set right. The time will come when the enemies of the Gospel will be destroyed and those who remained with Jesus will shine like the sun. God will remedy the situation. He will bring his people safely home.

We know that we are surrounded by unbelievers. Those who have remained faithful to our Lord Jesus have always been in the minority. Jesus says, "Have no fear, little flock!" If we were a huge flock, completely dwarfing the unbelieving world, we might see things differently. There are times when the Church seemed to be only a handful of people. Eight people were saved when the Flood came. Elijah thought that he was the only believer left in Israel. Only a few faithful followers of Jesus stood at the foot of the cross.

Back in the day when stadiums and theaters and concert halls were filled, it was a pretty good probability that Christians would be in the minority. It may be that way in your neighborhood or at the place where you work. Some may not be openly hostile to the Gospel as they interact with you, but they are not begging to hear about Jesus either. And the thing is that describes all of us by nature. We were all outside of God's family at one time. God brought us into his family through the Means of Grace. We heard and believed the Good News of the kingdom through the preaching and teaching of the Word. We were brought into God's very family through Holy Baptism. We have been strengthened through the Word and the Lord's Supper.

We wish that everyone was a Christian, following our Lord Jesus Christ. But everyone isn't! Wouldn't this world be a better place if there were only Christians in it? Not only Christians, but Christians who are totally committed to preaching God's Word faithfully and living Christian lives according to it? That sounds awfully good, but consider examples from history where the church tried to do that very thing. You had the Crusades. You had the Inquisition where heretics were hounded, hunted, and tortured in the name of truth. Martin Luther was put under the ban of Emperor Charles V after the Diet of Worms. He was declared to be an outlaw, free to be killed by anyone, no questions asked.

That is not the way of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are not to use the sword to make "sons of the kingdom." We have the Means of Grace, the gospel in Word and Sacrament. Those and those alone will make sons of the evil one into sons of the kingdom.

We know that God does protect his children. We see that over and over again. He saved the Israelites from the army of mighty Pharaoh, David from the Philistine giant Goliath, the three men from the fiery furnace, and Jonah from the belly of the great fish. As Peter languished in prison, the prison doors flew open without the guards even noticing. The Apostle Paul saw God's deliverance many times. What a comfort the Psalms are to us as we hear; "The Lord preserves the faithful, but the proud he pays back in full. Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord."

Jesus does not want us to execute judgment on unbelievers here and now "because, while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them." Jesus does not mean here that we cannot recognize those on the side of Satan. That may seem readily apparent at times. Only God knows who will remain sons of Satan. Can any of us properly distinguish between unbelievers who will always remain unbelievers and unbelievers who will one day believe the Word and become wheat? Who would have ever guessed that Saul, the great fanatical persecutor of the Christian Church, would have not only become a Christian, but God's missionary to the Gentiles, changing his name to Paul? I'm sure that

many might have prayed for his death, but God would do something else, something much greater. At one time James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village. After Jesus' resurrection, Philip had much success preaching the Gospel to the Samaritans. Every Christian congregation has those who came to faith much later in life, whose past wasn't very pretty.

Jesus does not want us now, in a miscarriage of justice, to cut anyone's time of grace short. "Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time, I will tell the harvesters: First gather the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn." God has the final say at the Judgment. We know that God is a God of perfect justice. The guilty will be punished, and the innocent will be set free. We know that we are declared "not guilty!" for the sake of our Lord Jesus. But what about those who did not trust in Christ? They will be weeded out and punished.

While we are in this world, we will suffer and endure. Even this is something good. No matter what the world throws at the Church, it will survive. The persecutions of the Jews and Romans could not destroy it. Communism could not destroy it. The Word still stands the Christian's trust while haughty empires lie in dust. The daily temptations from the world test our faith and make it stronger. We realize that this world is not our true home. Our true home is in heaven. We do not get too attached to the things of this world, and long even more for our Lord's return in glory.

There is also the opportunity the Lord allows us to witness to his truth before unbelievers. Many saw the courage and convictions of the Christians who faced death and would not compromise. We never know the effect that the Word has upon people. God can and does use you and me as his tools to reach many souls for his kingdom.

Be patient! The final harvest day is coming! At that time, the believers and unbelievers will be separated. It may appear at times that that day may never come or that wickedness has finally triumphed. Remember how dark things looked at Calvary. Did anyone think that that beaten, battered, bloodied, nail-pierced figure on the cross was in complete control? Who would have guessed that everything was as it had to be? And then came Easter morning.

The angels will carry out Christ's judgment. Satan and his followers will be cast into the fires of hell forever. "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Jesus calls us the "righteous," the perfect ones, the blameless ones. He has taken away all our sins and credited us with his perfection before God. At his coming, we will shine like the sun in all its glory. What a reward of grace!

Don't be impatient. God is still in control. There is still time for many to come to faith. When the last one has come to faith, then the final Judgment will arrive. Don't lose heart. Patiently trust your God. He will set everything right! AMEN.