

Introduction

As we have been observing for the last several weeks, there are a number of reasons why we simply cannot but speak the gospel. We should not be able to hold our tongues. We ought to be bursting to share the good news of Jesus Christ with anyone who will give us even but a moment. To this point each of the reasons we have studied flow out of wonderful and joyful amazement. So great is our salvation. So glorious is our God. So worthy is our Savior. And so powerful is the Spirit.

In contrast, this morning we need to consider a reason that rises out of a different kind of motivation. Rather than speaking out of the delight we have in something, sometimes we have to speak in the utter dread of what will happen if we do not speak. For example, in the aftermath of a heavy rainstorm you are traveling down a dark and unfamiliar road. Your car begins to shake and shudder and dies. You manage to pull off the side of the road. You get out of the car and realize that if your car had not died, you would have plunged to your death. The bridge ahead has been washed out. In its place there is only a drop-off of several hundred feet. Now, you see another car traveling down the road you came. It is not slowing down. The driver is unaware of the danger. What will you do? There is only one thing you can do, and you cannot stop yourself. Instinctively you lift your voice and wave your hands to warn the driver because you know the tragedy that will occur if you don't.

Likewise, the situation for the lost is so desperate, so potentially catastrophic, that we cannot but speak to warn them and call them away to safety. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. But for those who do not belong to him, unmitigated condemnation is already bearing down upon them and will soon come fully and destructively in a measure too intense to be quantified. We need to be reminded of the plight of the lost lest we lose a sense of urgency. So we are turning this morning to one of Jesus' parables—the parable of the wheat and the weeds.

[Read text and Pray]

The main lesson of this parable is for God's people to be patient while living in the world among the sons of the evil one. The wicked will be allowed to thrive for a while. At the end of the age everything will be set right. Justice will be served. For the purposes of motivating us to evangelism, to be determined in spreading the gospel, I want to focus on the outcome of the parable in regard to the weeds. The weeds are indicative of those who are outside the kingdom. The sons of the kingdom live lives surrounded by the sons of God's enemy. We inhabit the same earth, the same fields. But our destinies are completely opposite one another. And the destiny for which the sons of the enemy are headed is so breathtakingly awful that we should not be able to keep silent.

Let's look first at ...

I. The Weeds.

Our focus today is going to be on the weeds. Next week we will shift our focus to the destiny of the wheat because therein is another reason why we cannot remain silent, why we cannot but speak. Today, however, we are going to stay locked on the weeds. Who are the weeds? In the parable, they are the work of the Master's enemy. In his explanation Jesus identifies them as sons of the evil one. He further says they are law-breakers and causes of sin.

The weeds represent every person by nature, then. To sin is to break God's law, and that is what we all do by nature. In what we call the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus painstakingly demonstrated that the parameters of law-breaking include inward attitudes as well as outward actions. He also explained that the wrongs that we do flow forth from the hearts we possess. We are law-breakers from the heart. We lie. We serve all manner of gods other than the Lord. We are adulterers. We dishonor authority. We steal. We murder fellow human beings with our hate and anger and words. We follow the course of this world. Says Paul, we are by nature children of wrath. Everyone is born a weed. None is righteous, no, not one; ... all have turned aside; ... no one does good not even one. We are sons of the evil one. That is our nature.

Salvation, of course, is concerned with redeeming the lost, with rescuing sinners, and transferring them from the domain of darkness to the kingdom

of God's beloved Son. That is when weeds become wheat. But in contrast to the wheat, the weeds here in Jesus' parable are those persons who persist in unbelief. They remain in their sins. They reject Christ Jesus. They turn away from him. They perish unconverted. They live their lives for the moment and for the world. And they die still in a condition that is separated from God and his grace.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him might have eternal life. But the weeds do not believe in Jesus. They do not repent of sin. They do not have to be avowed worshipers of Satan. Whoever does not turn to Jesus is a son of the evil one. They are sown by the enemy of God who is the devil. The devil does not care so much if you worship him or not. He just does not want you to worship the one true God and follow Jesus.

The weeds and the wheat grow together. We who are redeemed, who believe in Jesus, live among the weeds. They are all around us. Everywhere we go in life, weeds are there. They live in our neighborhood. They drive on the same roads we do. Weeds work where we work. They go to the same schools we go to. They shop in the same stores and eat in the same restaurants. They walk on the same sidewalks and go to the same theaters. They fish. They skate. They play football, basketball, and participate in the Olympics. They vote. They fuel their cars. They are in the hospitals and doctors' offices. They enjoy the same parks as the wheat. They attend parties and get married. Like the wheat, they celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and graduations. The wheat and the weeds do business together and govern their cities, states, and nation. Weeds and wheat serve alongside one another in the police force and in the military. And the weeds, some of them, even go to church.

Here are people who are driving down life's road without a care for Christ. The bridge ahead is out, but they are oblivious. They don't like the signs; they ignore them believing them all to be a hoax, just a bad joke. These are the weeds. Perhaps you are one of them. But there can be no doubt you and I encounter them every single day. How can we but speak?

Let's look next at ...

II. The Harvest.

In the parable the master instructs his servants to allow the weeds and wheat to grow together until the harvest. At harvest time the weeds and the wheat will be separated from one another. Jesus explained to his disciples that the harvest stands for the close of the age.

The close of the age is the end of the current stage of God's creation. The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

We do not know how much time remains until the harvest, but we are told by Peter not to think the Lord is slow about his promise. Remember with the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day.

However, that day will come. A couple weeks ago we considered how Paul preached to the citizens of Athens. He warned of the great and awesome harvest day saying that "God ... has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Jesus warned that such a day will catch people by surprise. Of that day and of that hour no one knows. And as it was in the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (Matthew 24:36-39).

The harvest is depicted well by the parable of the sheep and the goats. Jesus declared that when the Son of Man comes in all his glory, and all his angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. On the harvest day, the weeds are separated from the wheat. It is a day of judgment, a day of distinguishing

between the sons of the kingdom, the people of God, and the sons of the evil one, the children of wrath.

Christians as well as non-Christians need to be dialed in to the fact that the harvest is coming. Sure, we are not to know WHEN it will be. However, we are absolutely assured THAT it WILL be. And we are told to be ready. Do you live like it could be any day? Do you live like everyday matters? Do you live like the end could suddenly come, and that means there is only so much time for you and me to complete the tasks the Lord has set apart for us to accomplish? Only so much time to pursue sanctification. Only so much time to make disciples.

How many times have we watched a bomb scene on television? Almost every time, the discovery of a bomb means there is a ticking clock. There is a count-down. Only so much time remains before the bomb needs to be disarmed or somehow miraculously dropped in the sea where it can explode. It is a race against the clock. And of course almost always the attempt to disarm the bomb is successful with barely a second to spare. But for the harvest the Lord has not given us a count-down clock. We sometimes grow lax. Not knowing the time and the day we feel like it may be far off. But the Lord directs us to live as though we see the clock ticking away each and every moment. The judgment is sure and is soon. Be ready. If you are a weed, don't wait another moment, come to Christ Jesus. And if you are a wheat, don't wait, don't procrastinate. The time is limited. The harvest gets closer every single hour. We cannot but speak!

Finally, let's look at ...

III. The Fire.

In the parable the master will tell the reapers at harvest time to gather the weeds ... and bind them in bundles to be burned. In his explanation, Jesus says that at the harvest, at the end of the age, he will instruct his angels to gather the wicked. They will throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is the destiny of those who die apart from Christ, those who are not sons of the kingdom. This is the destiny of every person who does not turn to trust in the lamb of God who takes away sin, who do not deny themselves and take up their cross to follow Jesus Christ.

It is a ghastly destiny. Jesus depicts it as a place, a place of extreme heat. It is a fiery furnace. In that furnace, the atmosphere is filled with weeping. Those who are sent there will also be gnashing or grinding their teeth.

It is not the first or last time Jesus described the agony of final judgment. He said that those who murder with their tongues would be liable to the hell of fire in Matthew 5 (v. 22). In Matthew 8, Jesus made it clear that Jews themselves who reject him will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place, he said, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The parable of the wedding feast mentions a person who comes without proper clothes. The king tells the attendants to "bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 22:13). In Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats, the goats are told to depart from Christ ... into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. He explains that they will go away into eternal punishment. Jesus also said that in hell, "their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched."

In addition to Jesus, the Apostle Paul speaks graphically about agonizing judgement. Romans 2:5 addresses the unrepentant saying, "Because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed." Verses 8-9 say, "there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress." In 2 Thessalonians 1 Paul warns that when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, he will inflict vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction."

The book of Revelation provides several additional descriptions of the horrors and terrors of hell. Here is Revelation 14:9-11. "And another angel, a third, followed him saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night.'" Revelation

21 depicts the fiery furnace as a lake of fire and sulfur. Into the lake will be cast anyone whose name is not written in the book of life.

What is written in the scripture could hardly be presented more terribly. The place to which unrepentant sinners are consigned for all eternity is unspeakably dreadful. The misery by which unrepentant sinners are to be consumed is inconceivably great. Imagine human wrath. People can do despicable things to torture one another. Various kinds of torture exist in the world. Their descriptions make your skin crawl. Yet human torture can scarcely be compared to the agony which will be inflicted by the infinite God.

It is not something in which he takes pleasure. Ezekiel 33:11 says, "As I live declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." God does not take pleasure in the torture meted out to the wicked, but his justice will be carried out. I don't remember who wrote it, but they rightly stated that God's severity in punishment is "the hostility of God justly directed at humans in response to their unjust hostility towards him."

Think of the torture of the cross. If there exists a more torturous method of execution, I don't know what it would be. Jesus Christ was delivered up to suffer and die on a cross. In this way he stands between repentant sinners and the condemnation of God. This picture tells us that God is serious about justice. And it shows us something of the magnitude of suffering which our sins require.

With these images in mind, let's underscore what Jesus stresses about the punishment of the wicked. First, he says where they are thrown is a fiery furnace. It is a place of fire. Have you ever heard of the brazen bull? It was a torture and execution method used in ancient Greece. A person was locked into a bronze bull figure. Meanwhile a fire was lit underneath. The victim was literally roasted to death in the throes of agony. Their cries of agony resonated and were amplified within the bull. Bystanders could not avoid the bloodcurdling sound. I can't imagine the fires of hell to be any less painful.

In the fiery furnace weeping is heard. If you were here a couple weeks ago, you may remember that I mentioned the wails of my relatives when loved ones had died and that of my dad when we thought my sister might be on the brink of death. Weeping expresses deep, deep sorrow and inner pain. That is what reverberates in the halls of hell. It expresses agony and regret and anguish. The tears in hell are not tears of repentance and sorrow over sin. But there is deep and inconsolable sorrow of wretchedness and hopelessness.

In the fiery furnace there is also the gnashing or grinding of teeth. According to William Hendriksen, it "denotes excruciating pain and frenzied anger." There is not a change of heart in those in hell. They still despise God. They still reject the Lord. They are forever angry with him. And they forever suffer under his punishment.

Another terrible truth about the fiery furnace is this. Its flame never goes out. Its smoke goes up forever. There is no end and no second chance. The smoke of torment goes up forever. And the worm does not die. There is always something for the worm to eat and always something for the flame to burn.

Not a few people imagine hell to be a place where the wicked carry on the wickedness they particularly enjoyed in their earthly lives. Nothing could be further from the truth. MacArthur states the truth when he writes, "Hell will not be a place, as some jokingly envision, where the ungodly will continue to do their thing while the godly will do theirs in heaven. Hell will have no friendships, no fellowship, no camaraderie, no comfort. It will not even have the debauched pleasures in which the ungodly love to revel on earth. There will be no pleasure in hell of any kind or degree—only torment, day and night forever and ever.

Such is the nature of hell. It is so terrible it cannot be fully described. If there ever was a place no one would want to be, this is it. Yet this is precisely where the overwhelming majority of human beings alive today are headed. There is none good, no not one. We have all broken the law of God. We have lied, worshiped other gods, stolen, killed, coveted, and committed adultery. We are all law breakers. The justice of God says hell

is what we deserve. But God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. He sent his Son into the world that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already. Perhaps today is the day someone in this very room would flee from the wrath to come. God does not play around. If you would be saved from the wrath to come, you must believe in Jesus the Son of God and Savior he sent to bear sin's penalty in our place. Trust him. Trust him now and he will save you now.

Conclusion

For us who have already come to faith in Christ, we have been commissioned to make disciples and preach the gospel of salvation. And how can we not? We cannot but speak. One of Jesus' impactful stories was of a rich man who went to hell. He was in anguish in the flame and sought someone to come cool his tongue with water. That being impossible, he sought that someone would be sent to warn his brothers lest they also come to the place of torment.

Followers of Christ, we are the ones who have been commissioned to warn the world. And how could we not? Every day we cross paths with countless folks living their lives in this world and for this world. They buy the secularism and the pluralism that the world is selling or else some corrupted gospel. They need to hear the truth. People need the Lord Jesus Christ. People need the warning. The bridge ahead is out and people are speeding down the road in that direction. People are asleep in apartment buildings that are on fire. We cannot but speak!

PRAYER

BENEDICTION

And now may the God of peace who has shed his grace on us, bless us and empower us to boldly and compassionately warn people everywhere of the wrath to come and share with them the glorious gospel of God's salvation that they might believe and be saved. Amen.