

Opposed: A Sabotaged Field

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 September 2015

Preacher: Jonathan Gemmell

[0 : 00] Also lovely to see you all here this morning. My name's John. I have the privilege of being the pastor. Please could you put your hand up if you are a new student. Nothing like embarrassing you your first arrival.

So we have a book for you called Beyond Beans on Toast. If you collect it on the way out, just put your hands up again. Okay, I can probably reach there.

So there's one. And you can be in a video next week with skills like that. And you can get one in the foyer on your way out.

Just two more bits of housekeeping before we tuck into Matthew 13. Me and my wife only ever argue once in the week. And that is before we leave the house on our way to church on Sunday morning.

And the reason we argue is because I'm obsessed with punctuality. Like if it was down to me, I would be here 40 minutes early.

[0 : 59] So we have this kind of... And if it was up to her, we'd be 40 minutes late. So we have this kind of negotiation every Sunday. And the reason that I am so obsessed with time is because my dad, every time we were doing anything as a family, would call a family meeting on Sunday night, on the night before.

One sec, I just need to... To... Please can I get the controller? I had my iPad working, but it stopped. Or there's one on the desk in my office, if that's a better thing. Sorry. I saw panic in the ranks.

But that was just me. Yes. So before we went out on the day, we'd have a family meeting on the night before. And he would say, You must have breakfast now. You must be ready now.

And the reason was not because he's a control freak, but because he would want everybody to travel together and be together in what we were doing as a family. He wanted no one left behind. So that's kind of a really long way around of telling you, tonight at 6.30, we have a vision evening. And that's like our family meeting, where we meet together to make sure that we're all ready and traveling together into all that God has for us.

[2 : 08] So please come tonight. We've got some really exciting things to launch. And Graham have written a book that you'll be able to look at and criticize ferociously. So please do come 6.30 in the upstairs hall.

Last thing, and then I'll do what I'm paid to do. This week has been our week of prayer. And it has been the most amazing week in the life of our church. We have seen some brilliant answers to prayer.

For those that were praying for me, I slept like a dream last night. Although I went to bed in tears because the England rugby team let me down. John Jolly's from Wales.

He's never been happier. And so what I want you to do is to pick up your weekly devotions. We slimline them.

You know when the independent went to the eye and its numbers went through the roof? We're hoping this will do the same. That the slimline weekly devotions, we'll all be tucking into God's word together. But on the back, we're going to pick a country every week and pray for it.

[3 : 10] And we're going to go in reverse order. We're going to go from the least evangelized country in the whole world. And we're going to pray for it this week, knowing that in the hands of a sovereign God, it will make a real difference.

So we're going to pray for Afghanistan. And in Afghanistan, one in 10,000 people are a Christian. And that, according to missiologists, is an unengaged country where the local population is so small that there's not the critical mass in and of themselves to make a difference in their country.

And so, what would happen if the 150 of us gathered here all prayed for Afghanistan this week? Could it just be that Afghans would turn to the Lord Jesus?

So please, pick that up. And now let me pray. And then we'll do some farming. Father God, we need you.

We love you. We're wholly dependent upon you. So Lord, in this time, may it not just be words hanging in the air, but may it be your words penetrating our hearts.

[4 : 25] So Lord, I pray for my friends in this room as I pray for myself. Lord, come and do your work to your glory alone, I pray. Amen.

Just put it up here, Fraser. I'll do it on my... Just put, like, the whole thing. Please could you turn back to Matthew 13. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. To wipe it. I'm not talking about sentimental tears.

I'm not talking about when Mustafa is trampled by the wildebeest. As you watch the Lion King in the cinema. I'm not asking about X Factor last night. Where it got a little bit emotional. As someone told them about their uncle that wasn't there anymore.

I'm not even talking about the most tragic film. Lussie come home. When Lussie comes bounding through the gate. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about when was the last time you cried.

[5 : 54] And what was it? What was the thing that made you cry? When you saw something and you thought that is not right. That is inherently wrong. Perhaps it was the Ebola crisis.

As you saw families torn apart. As some were taken away to be quarantined. And some were left. And they did not know whether they'd see each other again. Maybe it was as you read reports. That the richest country in the world. Qatar. Was employing migrant workers. Without any health and safety. And that they were dying. And no one was caring. Perhaps it was you saw these horrific pictures.

Of ISIS rounding up 21. Christian brothers and sisters. Before beheading them. On the beach. In Libya. What was the last thing that made you cry?

I'll tell you what makes me cry. Things to do with children. I can't cope with it. So two years ago when this was in the headlines.

[6 : 59] Baby P. We remember Peter Connolly. 18 months old. Subjected to eight months of the cruelest abuse. From his mother.

And her boyfriend. And his brother. Or perhaps it was this. In Peshawar. Where the army school was infiltrated by Taliban soldiers.

And 132 children and 13 adults were killed. Did you cry at that? We get so immune to these things don't we? Just see them all the time and become numb.

But these are real people really being actually killed. And 132 of them were children. And I'm sure we all cried at this.

What seems to have changed an utterly despairing situation. To one that has mobilised so many people to say. I want to help these people who are fleeing a country. For their lives.

[8 : 00] As the bodies of Aylan and Gallup Curdie washed up on Bodrum Beach. I wonder what was the last thing that made you cry.

But let's be clear. It's not just the things we see in the news is it? That lovely Christian couple that we grew up with. Have decided that they don't want to be together anymore. Because the husband had an affair.

And they're going to break up. And that breaks our heart. Because you remember when they got together. And they were so happy. And everyone said you were made for each other. But it didn't work out.

Or your young cousin who goes to the sick kids hospital. For an appointment that they thought was routine. But I called back and said it's not good news. Or what about your relatives who go Christmas shopping in Glasgow.

And just as they're walking down a street. They've walked down a hundred times before. A bin lorry is out of control. And it doesn't work.

[8 : 57] Or perhaps it's the friend who's utterly crippled by depression. That they cannot function properly. And as we think on these things. We think. We can but cry.

What was the last thing that made you cry? Let's be honest. In 21st century Britain. There is much to shed a tear about.

Pain. Suffering. Sorrow. Brutality. Evil. Corruption. Chaos. Starvation. Disease. Inhumanity. Bloodshed. Abuse. Tragedy. And unfairness of the world. Have left. Millions of people. Despairingly convinced that God cannot be real. Because of the amount of suffering that we see in our lives. He cannot be real.

People like Elie Wiesel. A Romanian Jew. Who with his whole family was shipped to Auschwitz one night. And this is what he writes. In his Nobel literature prized book.

[10:05] Night. He says. Never shall I forget that night. The first night in camp. Which has turned my life into one long night. Seven times cursed. And seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke.

Never shall I forget the little faces of the children. Whose bodies I saw burned. And turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames. Which consumed my faith forever.

Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence. Which deprived me of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments. Which murdered my God. And my soul. And turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things. If I am condemned. To live as long as God himself. Or the national treasure. Stephen Fry. In an interview with RTE.

Who's asked. If God really exists. And you met him. What would you say? And Stephen Fry said. I would say to God. If he did exist. How dare you? How dare you create a world.

[11:02] To which there is so much misery. That is not our fault. It's not right. It's utterly evil. Why should I respect a capricious. Mean minded. Stupid God. Who creates a world.

So full of injustice and pain. That's what I would say. Perhaps there's many here. In exactly that place. I'd love to believe in God.

But I look at the world out there. And I say. That cannot be true. I think they've got a point. Life hurts.

And it doesn't seem. That anybody is there. With the first aid kit. The world is out of control. And no one is at the steering wheel. From what I see. Man hurting man.

And no one is blowing the whistle. And saying. You're in detention. And so we're tempted to ask. As many have. Has God gone AWOL? How can God explain this world.

[12:04] That we live in. How does God account. For the misery. And evil. And injustice. What does it all mean? Where is it all heading? And what is God doing about it? Epicurus.

The Greek philosopher. Said this. That's so small. I can't read it. Is God willing to prevent evil. But not able. Then he is not omnipotent.

Is he able. But not willing. Then he is malevolent. If he is both able. And willing. Then whence cometh evil.

If he neither able nor willing. Then why call him God? Is God just out of the office. Does he even care?

That's what we're all asking. And well in response to the misery. Seeming absence. And apparent impotence of God. Jesus. God himself. Come to earth.

[13:04] To enter the misery of our world. Says I'll tell you. What this is all about. And I'll do it by telling you a story about farming. Why did 717 people die in Saudi Arabia this week?

Well Jesus tells us in a story about a field with two types of seed. And so please could you turn back in your Bibles to Matthew 13.

And just flip over the page where we have the wheat. The parable of the wheat and the wheat explained. So I'll read from verse 36. And just to get those up to speed who went here.

Last week we started this series with the parable of the soul. We went and learned four big things. These parables reveal and conceal truth. To those who love Jesus they get more. And to those that are hard hearted.

They get nothing. Whether you're good seed producing a crop depends on how you hear. And whether you assimilate this word into your lives. The kingdom grows gradually like seed.

[14:09] It's not a smash bang wallop. And Jesus' work is done through his word. And so we come to Matthew 13 verse 36.

Then he left the crowd. And went into the house. His disciples came to him and said. Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field. He answered. The one who sowed the good seed is the son of man.

The field is the world. And the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one. And the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age.

And the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire. So will it be. So it will be at the end of the age. The son of man will send out his angels.

And they will weed out of his kingdom. Everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace. Where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[15:05] Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father. Whoever has ears. Let them hear. So the first question we're forced to ask is.

Why are there weeds in the world? Why are there weeds in the world? It's very clear isn't it in the parable. Verse 24b.

The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. The seed was good. The creation was good. Genesis 1 is good and very good.

Seven times. God looked at all that he had made and it was. Don't sound that excited about it. And they live in this perpetual bliss.

In communion with God. Just imagine when it says they were walking in the call of the day with the Lord. And then don't we know Genesis 3. The story starts to unravel and the fall happens.

[16:06] And the serpent comes. And what does he do? Well he sows doubt into their lives. Doubt about the goodness of God. Doubt about the way that he set up the world to run. Doubt whether he's worthy of worship at all.

This perfect weedless paradise is changed to a place of weeds. That's even in the curse isn't it? Thorns and thistles grow up from the ground.

And that's what Jesus is retelling here. That there was a good creation. But the serpent, the enemy, the devil comes. And what does he do? He sows weeds amongst the wheat.

It's very clear from the very start. As it's very clear in this story that there is a real enemy. A real enemy who loves chaos.

Who looks at all those things that we saw at the start. And is utterly delighted with his work. As the weeds grow and chaos reigns and brutality is seen.

[17:07] He is delighted. And so we read that he is like a roaring lion walking around for someone to devour. Or he's like an enemy throwing flaming darts again and again at us.

That are only able to be repelled with a shield of faith. Or he's told as the father of lies who's always deceiving people.

Or in John 10. We have these two put side to side. The thief, the evil one, the devil comes to steal and kill and destroy. They're his three specialities. It's what he wants in your life.

To steal it. To kill you. And to destroy everything good in your life. And then in contrast. Jesus says I've come that they may have life and have it to the full.

The enemy comes and sows weeds. And he does it at night. He does it at night. Very vigilant farmers.

[18:15] Don Carson says in this parable. Sleeping does not imply the servants were neglectful. But that the enemy is stealthy, malicious and will not stop at anything to see good things ruined.

I think he's doing his work quite well in the West. Only 17% of Scottish people this day think that there's a real devil. Who's really running amok.

He stands there as like an invisible puppet master. Ruining lives and no one's even giving him the credit. Which I'm sure annoys him. But it's brilliant for his work. As it says in The Usual Suspects. Kevin Spacey speaking his verbal key. The greatest trick the devil ever played was convincing people that he didn't exist. No one even knows what he's up to.

But doesn't that explain what you see as you look out? That the world is a mess. And getting messier seemingly. That if we really did believe in evolution.

[19:24] In that kind of Darwinian evolution. That we're getting better. As we choose selective traits that are really useful in life. You'd think that we'd be a lot further on than we are.

I'm not really getting better. I don't see the world getting much better. In fact I see it quite the opposite getting worse. It doesn't seem that that kind of evolutionary ethic thing seems to really weigh out.

When I look at children being murdered in a school. As they try to learn to get out of the place that they're in. And so the servants come back to the field.

And they ask the master the question. Didn't you sow good seed? Didn't you sow good seed? And what does the master say?

Jesus himself. An enemy did this. An enemy did this. This wasn't the plan. It's been sabotaged. [20 : 28] Doesn't that also explain your life? That in this world there's many good things. I had a wonderful almond croissant for breakfast. It was good.

There's many good things. But there's many terrible things. And so is this field. It's a mixed field. There's some really good things. But there's some terrible things.

Because there's weeds. And there's weeds. It's probably true in your life. It's probably true in the week that you've just lived. Doesn't it make sense of the world?

Why are there weeds in the world? Because an enemy did this. There's a real enemy who hates us. He hates God. He hates good.

He loves darkness. He plots your destruction. And he futilely thinks that he can evoke regime change. Weeds were sown.

[21 : 32] They germinated as sin. They sprouted in pain. They ripened all the way up to rebellion. And ever since Genesis 3 that we looked at. It's not gone well.

It's not gone well. So my second question. And it is my last question. What can be done about the weeds in the world? What can be done?

God, when you do something. Why don't you intervene? If you really do know everything. Why can't you work out which ships in the Mediterranean are seaworthy and which ones aren't?

Are you neglecting us? What can be done about the weeds? And this is Jesus' perplexing answer. Because he says nothing now. Nothing now.

Verse 28b. The servants asked. Do you want us to go and pull them up? Do you want us to go and pull them up? Seems like a logical thing.

[22 : 34] That's what Ian Wilson does in his garden at the weekend. Verse 29. No. He answered. Because while you are pulling up the weeds.

You may uproot the wheat with them. That seems ridiculous, doesn't it? I mean, we are really advanced these days. We have pinpoint laser missile technology.

We don't even have to go to war anymore. Someone can sit somewhere down south in an office with a joystick. Fly it over. Drop some missiles. And can hit just a small building. And so if we can do that.

Surely God could go, well, weed, weed, weed, weed. Right? Or we do keyhole surgery where we do amazing operations by making the tiniest cuts in people's lack.

Surely we could do some kind of surgical strike when it comes to the weeds. I think all of us together could probably sort something out. So why can't God? God says it can't be done.

[23 : 38] Verse 30a. Can't be done. Let both grow together until the harvest. It'll be easy at harvest to differentiate between that which is wheat and that which is weed.

But right now you can't. It helps us to know that the weed in question was one called Darnell. And they look identical. They grow identically.

They grow at the same pace. They're the same color. They have the same ears. You cannot differentiate. But when it comes to harvest, Darnell, the ears turn purple.

And they're poisonous. And the wheat just looks like good old wheat. You can't tell the difference until they've ripened. And once they've ripened, it's clear as day.

Their identity is finally revealed at the end, not before. And so God says this is profound wisdom that we wait.

[24 : 43] And we're not rash and we're not harsh. There's somebody at the door. Because we're not harsh and we're not rash because we need to wait because it's only a harvest we'll see.

So babies at Brunfield are like the fashion accessory of the year. Like everyone's getting them. And many people will have gone and got their baby injected.

Now if you ask young Chloe, do you want this injection? She'll say, no mummy, I don't. It hurts. But why does Alex and Graham make them, make Chloe have an injection?

Because they know it's for their best. They're wiser than Chloe because Chloe's only six months.

Give it another three months and she'll maybe be on a par with Graham. So God is saying, I'm wise. And we get a lot of confidence trusting that he is wise. Trusting him even when it seems it's not working. So we see this in the Bible all the time. Joseph and his 11 rat bag brothers.

[25 : 50] If I was in charge, I'd have pulled them all up. A long time ago, Issachar, you're gone. Naphtali, you're gone. Leave Joseph alone. That's what we'd have done, wouldn't we?

And yet, in God's wisdom, they all grow together. And at the end of the story, you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good. To accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. Nobody would have done it like that. God did. What about the disciples? There's 12 of them. And one of them is called Judas Iscariot. If I was in charge, I probably wouldn't have chosen her in the first place.

If ever there was a weed in the world, it seems to, at harvest time, have been here. And yet, what does God do? The Lord Jesus, he eats meals with him.

He lets them grow together. Why? Because in the wisdom of God, through Judas' betrayal, Jesus would be put to death. Meaning that there would be the best herbicide ever imagined that all sin and death, all mourning and crying and all evil would be put away.

[27 : 03] No one's doing it like that. Because God is wise. Saul of Tarsus, in his early life, he'd have been the first one in the fire, right? As he stands there and says, Stephen, you die.

I'll even collect the coats and I'll smile as you do it. Oh, what about John Gemmel? John Gemmel, until the age of 16, was not a nice person, really. I was at boarding school.

I've always sounded a little bit funny, which makes you the real target of bullying and abuse. And so you develop this mentality that I really want to hurt you before you hurt me. So you turn into not a nice person. And yet then, in the wisdom of God, you become so lonely, so empty and so lost in life, that when somebody comes along and says, actually, God loves you.

And he's ordained for you to be like that. And I think he even has plans that it'll be you so you could tell other people about Jesus. You'll go, well, that's great.

But if you'd seen me at 14 elbowing a guy in the face before a corner on the football field, you'd have gone, you need to go. You're a real weed.

[28 : 09] God's purposes are perfect. He says nothing now. Let them grow together. And I'm so thankful because there's space for grace, right?

We've all got people in our lives that are not trusting Jesus. If harvest comes now, my brother Ed is not going to go well. He'll be one of those bundled and burned.

And so I'm so thankful that the two are allowed to grow up together for a little while. Meaning that there's reason to pray and hope that life and grace will be poured out. What could be done about the wheat in the world?

Nothing now. But this is the good news and we're nearly finished. Everything then. Everything then. It is a deferred judgment and a delayed harvest. They grow up together. But in the end, they'll be divided.

The clock is ticking, but at the moment, there's space for grace. I got up early this morning. Quarter past seven, parked my car and it was beautiful.

[29 : 15] On the meadows, there was even a little mist. This morning, God told the sun to shine and it's shining. He doesn't do it often in Scotland, but today he was good to us. One day he'll say the sun will not shine.

And then the end will come. The clock is ticking. One day, harvest time will be here. Everything will have been ripened. And there'll be a real division between the wheat and the weeds.

If you're here on Tuesday morning for the prayer breakfast, and I was so encouraged by how many were here. Or else I would have had a lot of almond croissants. Paul was telling us about the sheep and the goats, that at the end there'll be a real division between those that are sheep, who have trusted and loved Jesus, and those that are goats who will be, the sheep will be gathered and the goats will be scattered.

And I mean, verse 42 is horrendous. Let me read it slowly. The son of man will send out his angels and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

They will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. That's not just an event. That is a perpetual state.

[30 : 35] That is horrendous. So there is sin and wickedness in the world. But one day, harvest will come.

It's very sobering. We're not playing at this. That if everything that God says about his son in the Bible is true and why he came, then it is the most important, important thing we can ever think about.

Because real life is an offer. I was so grateful to Pete, who was praying on Monday night. He prayed brilliantly this morning, but he prayed on Monday night as well. As I was just starting to wrestle with this. And we were praying for the world. And in fact, the 15 worst war zones in the world. It's been a very jolly week.

And Pete came out with this brilliant line. And it stuck with me and resonated with me all week and has been so helpful. As we look out on our world, we cry.

[31 : 41] God, how much more are you crying as you look at your world? And then he quoted 2 Peter 3 verse 9. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises. As some understand slowness.

Instead, he is patient with you. Why is he patient? Not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to eternal life. When it's lights out, it's all out.

And the dividing line is drawn. But there is time. There's time this afternoon. There's time this week. There will be a harvest. And with harvest, judgment will come.

But at the moment, there's space for grace. And so five quick things. And I mean, they are super quick. They're a sentence each, so don't despair. First one is this.

Respond. If you do not know Jesus this morning, then really do think about whether this is true. Because there's nothing more important than that.

[32 : 42] There is nothing more important than that. Respond. Secondly, we can trust God.

It makes us so angry as we see the injustice and brutality in the world. It makes us so angry that it's spoiled.

But what we learn is that nobody in the end will get away with it. Nobody. Nobody will get away with it. Those people who cut the swords across the heads of our 21 Christian brothers, they will not get away with it.

No matter how long they evade the authorities. No sin will remain unaccounted for. No injustice will not be righted.

And that's really comforting if we know Jesus today. It's really discomfoting if we don't know Jesus today. But it's very comforting that we can trust him.

[33 : 43] That in the end, all sin will be paid for. And it will either be paid for by Jesus on our behalf or by ourselves. Time is short.

It's closer now than when I started speaking 31 minutes and 6 seconds ago. We can risk. We can risk.

We can be risk takers if we know Jesus. The weed and the weeds are together. We don't need to isolate ourselves from the world. We don't need to move to hermetically sealed trenches and just wait till harvest time.

Because the beautiful thing is the wheat and the weeds are together. They're intermingled. And so we can shine for Jesus. That many people on that harvest day, it may turn out that they weren't weeds.

Because Jesus was gracious to them and they were actually wheat. So we can take great risks in our lives. But oh, we've got great hope. We've got great hope.

[34 : 43] As Graham read at the beginning in Revelation 21, it is not always going to be like this. There'll be a day where there'll be no more tears or crying or mourning.

There'll be a day when it's all right. It's all perfect. It's all going well. And we don't just know God is at the steering wheel of the universe because we'll see him face to face right at the center of the universe and be mesmerized by his glory forever.

Last thing, because we know that is like that then, it means we can cry now. We can cry tears for people. John Knox, it was said, in Scotland, would go up to the castle and he would cry over Edinburgh every day and he would say, God, give us Scotland or I'll die.

With tears down his face. The beautiful thing is that tears are temporary. Your ability to cry is for this life only. Because in the end, there'll be no more tears or pain or mourning or crying.

Jesus cried. None of those were wasted. He cried over a city and those tears were not meaningless. Because as he cries, he says, I want to gather them as hen gathers a chick.

[36 : 19] I want to gather you as hen gathers a chick. And then he dies on a cross so that with such gentleness that he comes to us in the gospel, he gathers us to himself.

Respond to Jesus. Trust God's wisdom. Risk your whole life to make much of him. Hope because it won't always be this way. And cry. Let's not be stiffed, upper-lipped Scots and are just toughing it out.

So I want to finish with my favourite quote of all time and it's from Lord of the Rings. It's from The Two Towers, the middle book, and it's absolutely the bleakest moment in the unfolding trilogy. And Frodo says to Sam, I can't do this, Sam. I can't go on. And Sam replies, I know it's all wrong. By rights, we shouldn't even be here, but we are.

It's like all the great stories, Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end because how could it be happy?

[37 : 27] How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened? But in the end, it's only a passing thing, the shadow. Even darkness must pass.

A new day will come. And when the sun shines, it will shine out all the clearer and brighter. Let's pray. Father God, we rejoice that you're wise.

We thank you that you're good. And so, Lord, I pray that your word would resonate in our hearts long after we leave this place. Father, I pray that you would have given us ears to hear, minds to understand, hearts to absorb, and wills to obey.

So bless us in Jesus' name. Amen.