

Welcome to the Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast. I'm Travis Pauley, and here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. This episode is the fifth part of a series of discussions on kingdom parables. I hope you enjoy this study.

TRAVIS: All right. Well, welcome back, everybody, and welcome back, Wes --

WES: Thanks.

TRAVIS: -- to the studio.

WES: Good to be back in the studio --

TRAVIS: It's very good to be back.

WES: -- continuing our discussion.

TRAVIS: We're on a nice run of talking about kingdom parables --

WES: Yes.

TRAVIS: -- and we will not break that streak today.

WES: That's true. Not today. Not in this episode.

TRAVIS: We're going to keep going in Matthew 13.

WES: Continue on Matthew 13, yes. What is the kingdom of heaven? So that's what we've been talking about, and just to kind of review, I guess, for just a second, we've talked about -- I think, for me, the most important part of what Jesus reveals about the kingdom of heaven in these parables is the fact that it's going to come in the midst of other things, of the other age. There is the age of evil, the age of sin and death, the age of the kingdoms of man, and the kingdom of heaven will come in the midst of those things, that it's not going to be a break where one era

ends and the other one begins, that the kingdom-of-heaven age, the age of the kingdom of heaven, will begin while this age continues, and there will be this time of overlap. And I think that, for me, that's one of the most important parts of these parables and the most shocking part for Jesus' original audience.

TRAVIS: Yeah, I think that's been something -- maybe the biggest thing I've gotten out of this study, personally, is looking at these parables and seeing, you know, Jesus is always comparing sort of God as the character that's -- there's something that's too valuable for him to -- for him to miss, like the citizens of the kingdom that are still in the world. Like as you said, there's this overlap, but it seems to answer a lot of questions, like a lot of common questions that we have about pain and suffering. Why does God allow pain and suffering?

WES: Yes.

TRAVIS: And Jesus' answer that he sort of gives over and over again in different angles of -- is the citizens of the kingdom in the world, they're too valuable for him to just rip up. We're not ready for that yet. You know, we can't just pick the crops and -- you know, because we don't want to -- it's not time to distinguish between the crops and the weeds and it's -- you know, it definitely gives me a different perspective on that overarching question that I think we all have as people, let alone, I think, definitely as Christians that, you know, why -- why is this taking so long kind of thing.

WES: Yeah. And I think we've even gotten to the point where we've pushed off all of our hope so that, as Christians -- you know, the world is

asking why is there pain and suffering, and we're -- our constant thing is, well, because, you know, the hope is to come, and that's absolutely true and I think that we don't need to miss that. There is a day of judgment, a day when sin and death and destruction will all be destroyed. We'll actually talk about that here in just a second.

But I think what we sometimes miss is that the hope has been planted in the here and now, that for Christians, that in Christ, our future hope is already a present reality. Let me say that again because both are true and it's kind of a paradox. It is a future hope, but it's also a present reality. That's the shocking, wonderful thing about being in Christ. Paul talks a lot about this in Ephesians, that he talks about our future hope as if it's already a present reality because, in Jesus, it is. He even talks about us being seated with Christ in the heavenly places now, presently, in the present tense, that this isn't something that is just to come, that it's already a present reality.

It's almost like -- you know, I have a hard time not comparing things to the Chronicles of Narnia, but if you've read those books, you have these kids that go through the wardrobe and they end up in Narnia and they become kings and queens in Narnia and then they go back to England. They go back to the real world. I shouldn't say "the real world." They go back to the seen world, and the unseen world of Narnia is still there, and they still remember it and they still think about the time when they were kings and queens in Narnia. And it's sort of like, for those kids, when they're back in England and going through the regular things, they're still kings and queens in Narnia. And that's

what's true for us, is that in Christ we are already royalty in the Messiah, in what Jesus has done. He has adopted us into his royal family and it's not evident yet.

You look at us and you think, well, this person is still poor and broken and hurting and all of these things are wrong with him. And he says, yes, but you can't see who I really am in Christ. In Christ, I'm already glorious. In Christ, I'm already royalty. And so there is a sense in which our future hope, which isn't yet fully realized -- and that has to be admitted; it's not fully realized yet. I hope there's more than this, right? But there's also a sense in which our future hope is already a present reality, and I think that's revealed in a lot of these parables.

So one of the things -- and we keep kind of referencing this, is the parable of the weeds, and it occurred to me, as I was listening back to that episode when we talked about the parable of the weeds, I sort of explained it -- or explained my take on it, but I didn't actually read Jesus' explanation because it comes later in Matthew 13, so I'm going to read that in Matthew 13, starting in verse 36. He says -- Matthew says, "Then he left" -- Jesus left -- "the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.' And he answered, 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels,

and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all lawbreakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.'"

So I think that, again, this illustrates the fact that the Son of Man has come -- you know, Jesus has come and he has planted the seed, and the sons of God have grown up in the world but the end of the age hasn't come yet. And that's what's shocking, is that the age of the messiah has come, but the end of the other age hasn't come yet. But I think we do need to talk about that future hope. We need to talk about the point in time when God will deal with, as he says, "causes of sin and all lawbreakers," that day of judgment when the wheat and the tares are separated and judgment happens and destruction happens. Sometimes we think of that as a negative, but I think it's -- for followers of Jesus, that should be an overwhelmingly positive thing. Not that we desire anybody to be punished or destroyed, but we desire for sin and death and brokenness to be done away with. Not just -- when we think about sin, we tend to think about people, and that's part of it because their lives are wrapped up in rebellion. But it's also about longing for the day when God's good creation is purged; when all of the sinful things and everything that is in rebellion to God's rule and reign have been purged from God's good creation and it's just exactly what he wants it to be, and "the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father," and so that's -- that is our hope is that day that's coming.

And then there's another parable that's so very similar, and I think

it's good that we're tying these two together, is the parable of the net. And he says in verse 47 -- I'm skipping a few things because we've already talked about the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value, but then in verse 47 he says, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Now, I think, again -- and I've mentioned this before, that I think too often we conflate "kingdom" and "church" and so I've often heard this, like "There's good and bad in the church." I don't think that's what Jesus is saying. He's just saying that the Son of Man has come to spread his kingdom over the world -- to spread his net in this case -- spread his net over the world and there's going to be good and bad that continue to be in the world over which he reigns, that the messiah is reigning -- I mean, that's the question. Is Jesus reigning? Well, yeah, of course, Jesus is reigning. Has his kingdom come? Yes, of course it's come. Is there still evil in the world? Yep, there's still evil in the world. Why? Well, because the harvest hasn't come. Or, in this case, the bringing in of the net. And at some point in the future the net is going to be brought in and the angels are going to separate the good from the bad, the wicked from the righteous, and the wicked will be destroyed. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, anger, disappointment, frustration, you know, all

of those things because they didn't listen. They didn't receive the word. They didn't become obedient to God's rule and reign.

And that's -- for us, you know, again, it might not be as surprising as it was to them, but they really expected, when the messiah comes, that will be the end of the age. When the messiah comes, all of the bad things will come to an end. When the messiah comes, judgment happens and destruction happens. But, again, to the point you brought up earlier, that would require him to do away with everybody because there was no one that was righteous, and so in order for the kingdom to include us, it had to work this way, where the net was spread over the world and where all the fish were able to come in and that, at the end of the age, then would be the judgment. And so that point in time has yet to come. Even though the net has been spread, the kingdom has been established, the sorting out of the good and the bad, the wicked and the righteous, has yet to come.

TRAVIS: I think, as you were talking about this, I -- one thing I keep thinking of is -- and it makes me wonder if this was Jesus' purpose for sort of -- again, as we read it, this sort of retelling of the same concept over and over again, like he's just using all these different stories -- maybe he didn't do it back to back to back, but all of these stories sort of driving the same point home, it makes me think of -- it makes me appreciate the concept of redemption and how maybe that's something that takes some time, maybe, to truly appreciate it. Like, I mean, I think about that in my own life as a Christian, that it's like -- you know, I'm sure some people listening could relate and, you know, I grew up in the

church, was baptized pretty young, and not -- I don't think for a second that that's invalidated, but I also think it's true that, like, what I know now, how I can appreciate it now and the path that that set me on and the fact that, yeah, that redemption -- like I keep getting new layers and new -- there's new paradigm shifts of what that means to me in my life.

And I think, you know, as we're talking about these parables and this idea of the overlap and how that's necessary, I think that -- I think that's true of a lot of life, that it's -- it's like time makes you -- it can be hard, but it also makes you appreciate things. You acquire depth in time, and, man, I think he's certainly given us a lot of time.

WES: Yeah, absolutely. And I think that that's a great point. I think that idea of time and the idea of the patience of God -- and we've discussed that a little bit already, and I think that you bring up a great point, too, in that that should develop patience in us. Not just patience -- I guess there's several levels. On one hand, there should be patience with ourselves as we are being sanctified, as our own minds and hearts -- as you said, as our paradigms continue to shift and as we continue to learn new things; and then also patience with others, that as they're becoming, you know, familiar with the truth and as it's being sorted out who they are, you know, whether they're the good fish or the bad fish, and so they're -- they are becoming who they are going to be. And so we exercise patience with each other; we exercise patience with ourselves.

But I think there's also this -- this perspective that this should give us about the world, that -- back to your original point about why is there still evil in the world, and I think that this should give us a lot of pause

before we try to accomplish good or rid evil by our own devices, through our own innovations. And so I think we get impatient and we say, well, evil's going to be victorious and evil is going to win and we have to deal with this evil and we have to get rid of this bad stuff, whatever this bad stuff is, in the world. And that compulsion to do that is good and righteous and holy. It is good to want to deal with evil, but how do we deal with it? Do we deal with evil the way the world deals with evil? Because that's -- that's the impatience, right? The impatience says, "Well, the evil people just need to die. Let's kill them all," and that's what they expected. They expected the messiah to come and to deal with all the bad fish.

And Jesus' whole preaching and teaching revealed you're all bad fish. You know, the Jews and the Gentiles, you know, the Pharisees and the tax collectors, everyone, all of you, have fallen short of God's glory, and so if I'm going to sort everybody out now, you're not going to like it very much because you're all wicked, and so if it's the sword you want, you're not going to like how that ends. But we have a tendency, even as Christians, to say, okay, well, Jesus didn't come with a sword, but I need one because I'm going to take care of all the bad people and I'm going to take care of the evildoers and I'm going to accomplish what Jesus didn't accomplish. And that's his whole point with the parable of the weeds and the wheat. And he says, no, it's not time for that yet, because if you do that, you're going to mess things up.

And what -- I think -- let's look at another passage. We'll kind of break off from the parable here and look at, you know, Paul's letter.

Romans Chapter 12 is one I always come back to because I think this -- you know, everything that Paul writes in the epistles -- and not just Paul, but the other apostles, as well, are "This is what it looks like to live out this good news, to live out these kingdom -- this kingdom reality." And so he says in Romans 12, starting in verse 14, he says -- well, even let's go -- sorry. I always do that; I start at one place and I think, no, no, no, we need more context. Let's start in verse 9. He says, "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good." So, like, that idea, like I hate what is evil, like, that's good. That's a good compulsion to hate what is evil and to hold fast to what is good. "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer."

So, I mean, even that one -- I mean, we can just park right there for a second. "Rejoice in hope." So we're rejoicing in what is to come, and so, again, our future hope is already a present reality and that's why we can rejoice in that hope. But then we also are patient in tribulation because we know how this story is going to end. We know what's coming. We know what God is going to do and so we can endure tribulation. We can endure hardship.

"Be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them." I think we -- we so underestimate the significance of this kingdom principle of loving your enemies, blessing those who persecute you, bless and not curse them. I mean, it goes beyond don't

curse them, like don't say bad things about them. But it goes beyond that to say bless them, do good to them, and that is a kingdom ethic. It is a uniquely kingdom ethic and it comes back to exactly these parables about the fish or the parables about the wheat and the tares to say evil will exist for a time and there's going to be this time of overlap. And, again, I come back to the story of David and Saul, and David knew that Saul's reign had essentially come to an end. He knew that God had transferred power to himself and not to Saul, but yet he did not take it upon himself to end Saul's reign. He had the opportunity to kill Saul and he could have taken that as a sign: "Well, God gave him into my hands; God must have wanted me to use the sword and kill him." And David says, "No, you're God's anointed one and I'm not going to be the one to take you out," and so he allows time to run its course. He allows God to deal with his enemies rather than taking it upon himself.

And this is exactly what Jesus tells us to do, is to be patient in tribulation. This is the kingdom ethic. Continue to love your enemies; continue to bless those who persecute you. I'm going to deal with wickedness. I'm going to deal with evil. The day of judgment, the day of harvest, the day when the nets are brought in, it's all going to take place. Yes, the net has been cast out. Yes, the seed has been planted. Yes, the kingdom has come, but you're not going to hasten the destruction of evil by doing things your own way. In fact, we actually become evil when we try to fight against evil. That will be Paul's next point. He says, "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but

give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." And I've heard that verse twisted so many times, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

TRAVIS: Well, he said, "if possible."

WES: Yeah, "if possible," right. Exactly. And that's like the loophole that we use. And it's like, "Well, my dad used to always tell me, 'Don't start any fights, but if somebody else starts it, you can finish it.'" And it's like, well, that's not what he's saying. He's saying that there's going to be times where you're persecuted. There's going to be times where people do not treat you peaceably, do not treat you peacefully. There's going to be tribulation you suffer, but don't let it be by your own hand. Don't let it be something, not only that you don't start, but also that you don't participate in, that you don't participate in not living peaceably with everyone. Because, again, you can't live out those other things that he says: Bless and don't curse; bless those who persecute you; repay no one evil for evil. And I guess that's -- and it's so ironic, I think, that we use phrases like "Fight fire with fire." I mean, that's such a telling phrase, and it really -- it really reveals something that is in our heart that we think the only way to fight fire is with fire; the only way to fight evil is with evil.

And by "evil," we tend to think like bad, like sin, but evil is more than that. Evil is more like pain. It's more like -- you know, again, it's things like when Saul -- I keep coming back to Saul and David, but when Saul was king, God sent an evil spirit to torment him. Now, when we see

evil spirit, we say how could God send an evil spirit? Well, "evil" just means it was painful, some sort of ailment that God sent into Saul's life, into his body to torment him. It doesn't mean that it was sinful or wicked. It means evil as in painful, bad, you know, that kind of thing. And so we -- that's how we tend to think. We tend to think when somebody punches me, I've got to punch them. If somebody burns my house down, I'm going to burn their house down. The only way to fight fire is with fire; the only way to fight force is with force. And Paul says the kingdom ethic says don't repay evil with evil. In fact, ironically, mindblowingly, we return good when people do evil to us. When somebody does something evil to us, we return good to them.

He says -- where was I? "Repay no one evil for evil," verse 17, "but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live at peace with all. Beloved, never -- never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" And there's that idea. I mean, there's that reminder that we believe that the day of the net being drawn in -- we believe that the day of harvest is coming, and so we don't -- we don't have to fight evil with evil. We don't have to repay anyone because we know that that day of judgment is coming and so we trust the net has been spread, that the seed has been planted, and that the day when evil will be purged from the world happens.

But then we're still asking this question, yeah, but what do we do? Like what do we do in the meantime? Like how do we fight against evil? Shouldn't we be participating in trying to get rid of as much evil as we

can? I'm glad you asked. Look at verse 20. It says, "To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he's thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." And that phrase right there, it implies that we are participating in their judgment, that this is the way we fight against evil. This is the way we participate in the judgment of the wicked: We do good to them. And, of course, the objection to that is like, well, wait. No, Wes, you can't say that. You can't say we should be nice to mean people. You can't say be good to evil people because then they win. And it's like a-ha, that reveals our fear. Our fear is that evil is going to somehow win, when the entire thing that Jesus is telling us, the entire good news is evil has already been defeated, that it's -- the battle has already been decided and that evil cannot win and that the only way we're going to participate in the victory is by doing good and loving people that are evil.

TRAVIS: I think, as we're talking -- we're talking about the end. We're talking about the harvest. We're talking about, you know, when it's time for the kingdom and the world to not be overlapping, that it's time for the kingdom to take its reign, and one of the things that I've been thinking a lot about lately is the idea that's presented in scripture of the divining rod or the -- at the end times, you know, we'll be sorted out like metals to be tested for our worth and our -- yeah, our worth and our authenticity and --

WES: Yeah. Refined. The refining fire.

TRAVIS: The refining fire. And one of the things I think about that is like I think we get -- and I think, as a Christian, it's a goal for us to sort of

put ourselves voluntarily through microversions of that through our lives. Like I -- you know, I think -- a lot of the guys I follow talk about, you know, the importance of facing things voluntarily. If you let it come to you, it's going to be a lot worse, but if you have something in yourself, you need to fix. And I think that's what -- and I think, when I read Jesus' teaching, I see it a lot more. He's talking to you. He's talking to the individual.

And I think in the letters -- obviously, they're written to churches. They're sort of written to -- okay. How do we get Christians to deal with each other, deal with the people outside of the Christian community? But I think a lot of that is like -- you know, I think sometimes we talk about how verses can be misquoted, especially Paul's. I feel like a lot of those can -- and I think a lot of that is, you know, the illusion that when we see evil, that -- like you said, that we need to go fix it, and part of that is not trusting God, but I think part of it is also a distraction from what that calls out in me. Like what does it say about me that I had a reaction to that? What is it about me that I'm seeing reflected? What is it -- and I think -- I don't know. The little bit older I get, the more I see the utility in if I see something bad, doesn't mean it's not bad. It doesn't mean I'm always going to be wrong, although probably best to operate under the assumption that's a possibility.

WES: Sure.

TRAVIS: But I think taking that opportunity to ultimately look inward and go, okay, what is it -- because I can't fix people. I can't go change anybody no matter how much I'd like to. So the -- whatever the solution

I come up with is probably going to do more harm than good.

WES: That's a good phrase.

TRAVIS: But I can spend this time burning off the deadwood in me. I can spend my time fighting evil by -- you know, because there's almost a self-absorption that I think is actually, in itself, very selfless. That it's like, no, I'm going to focus on me and fixing me because what happens when I do that is my life gets better, people around me's life actually improves because I'm not such a misery to be around, maybe a little less wretched and miserable to be around, and maybe that has indirect consequences even beyond that.

And I think a lot about that because we were talking about what do we do? What do we do? I think that is sort of the question a lot of us have. What do we do in this time waiting for Jesus? And I think, especially when I read Jesus, I see that the answer, in a lot of cases, is start with yourself. Like start -- make it so that God has to burn off as little as possible from you in the end. You know, that's not a bad goal.

WES: Yeah. And I think verse 21 speaks to that, as well. He says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." So, I mean, there's two things there, and the first, I think, speaks exactly to what you're saying. "Do not be overcome by evil," and that's exactly what we allow to happen when we see something evil, we see something painful, we see something that isn't right, something that's broken in the world, and we -- we attack it with our own sort of brokenness. You used the phrase "we make the situation worse," something like that, and that's exactly right. And when we make -- not only do we make the situation

worse, but we make ourselves worse in the process and we are actually overcome by evil. That's what happens when we fight fire with fire, is we both get consumed.

You know, who was it that said "An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind"? And that's exactly what ends up happening when we -- when we say, okay, well, you have a sword and so I'm going to get a sword, or you have fire and I'm going to get fire, then we are consumed by it and we become overcome with evil. But he says, but you're actually able to overcome evil by doing good. By being good and by doing good, by being who you're supposed to be and by doing good in the world.

And you look at books like I Peter, and I Peter deals with the same sort of kingdom ethic. What do you do when you, as God's people, are enduring the weeds? What do you do when you're enduring the bad fish? What do you do when you're enduring the tribulation? Here's what you do: You be faithful and you do good to people. You do as much good as you can. And I think you're exactly right. That is a refining process of suffering evil while doing good, and that's something Peter talks about constantly, is we endure evil while doing good, and that doing good in the world to everyone -- to the poor, to the broken, but also to the oppressors.

You know, we talk a lot about Jesus' love for oppressed people, and that's true; Jesus loved and cared for the marginalized and the oppressed, but he also cared for the marginalizers and the oppressors. The tax collectors were an oppressive group of people. These were Jews that worked for the Romans. And to put it in maybe more modern

context, it would be like the Jewish people who worked for the Nazis in the ghettos and helped the Nazis persecute their own people, and it was like those people were the most, you know, reprehensible oppressors were those that should have known better and participated in the oppression.

And Jesus comes and he cares not only for the oppressed, but also for the oppressors, and he does good to everyone. And that's what he calls us to do. That's the kingdom ethic. And it's like, "Yes, I not only am going to deal with evil, but I'm dealing with evil. And how am I dealing with evil? Well, first, I'm refining you. I am redeeming you. I'm sanctifying you, and I'm doing that through you taking up your cross and following me, but I'm also working on them." "How are you doing that, Jesus?" "By you doing good to them. When they're hungry, you feed them. When they're thirsty, give them something to drink." And you say, "Yeah, but Jesus, they're bad." And Jesus says, "Yeah, so are you. You're broken, too, and this is how I changed you and this is how I'm changing them." "Yeah, but some people won't be changed and some people will continue to be bad and I can't make everybody good by doing good things to them." And Jesus says, "You're right, and I'm going to deal with all of that. I'm going to set everything right in the end. I'm going to purify everything. I'm going to judge evil and I'm going to destroy evil and sin. But in the meantime, this is how you behave. This is how you make the world a better place, by becoming who I want you to be, but also by doing good to everybody around you."

*I really hope you enjoyed this Bible study and I hope you'll subscribe to hear future episodes of the podcast. A big thank you to Travis Pauley, as well as our McDermott Road church family, for helping to make this podcast possible, and a special thanks to all of you for listening. We love you, God loves you, and we hope you have a wonderful day.*