**WHAT CAN WE COUNT ON?**

**(Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)**

It is through story that we find our place in the world, and stories speak to our imaginations and to our heart like little else can. It was 30 years ago this year that a motion picture appeared which spoke to a generation of men. It addressed either their regret that they never had a close relationship with their dad or a hope to have one. The movie was *Field of Dreams.*

In the story, Kevin Costner’s character, Ray Kinsella is a family man and a farmer living in the corn country of Iowa. He starts hearing a voice telling him, “Build it, and he will come.” He becomes convinced that he is being led to build a baseball diamond in the middle of his corn crop. It seems illogical even insane for him to do so, but he does.

In the story, he befriends a disillusioned authornamed **Terence Mann**, played by the golden-voiced James Earl Jones. Mann has cut himself off from society, but Ray earns Mann’s support. Close to the end of the film James Earl Jones delivers a speech like only he could:

Ray. People will come, Ray. They’ll come to Iowa for reasons they can’t even fathom. They’ll turn up your driveway not knowing for sure why they’re doing it. They’ll arrive at your door as innocent as children, longing for the past. “Of course, we won’t mind if you look around,” you’ll say. “It's only $20 per person.” They’ll pass over the money without even thinking about it, for it is money they have and peace they lack. And they’ll walk out to the bleachers; sit in shirt-sleeves on a perfect afternoon. They’ll find they have reserved seats somewhere along one of the baselines, where they sat when they were children and cheered their heroes. And they’ll watch the game and it’ll be as if they dipped themselves in magic waters. The memories will be so thick they’ll have to brush them away from their faces.

The one constant through all the years, Ray, has been baseball. America has rolled by like an army of steamrollers. It has been erased like a blackboard, rebuilt and erased again. But *baseball* has marked the time. This field, this game; it’s a part of our past, Ray. It reminds us of all that once was good, and that could be again. Oh . . . people will come, Ray. People will most definitely come.

And they did. The film ends with Ray playing catch with his dad, and in the distance, you see a long line of cars headed their way.

James Earl Jones’ character seems to be saying that in this ever-changing world of ours, baseball is one thing that we have been able to trust and count on. Of course, that movie was made before 1994 when MLB fans witnessed the beginning of a 232-day player strike during which 948 games were cancelled, including the World Series. It was the first time and what is still the only time since 1904 that the World Series was not played.

The shortened 1995 season witnessed a full 20% reduction in attendance and numerous protests against both owners and players. One man went to a game and held up a sign that read, “Field of (Dreams was crossed out & replaced with) Greed.”

That movie was also made before Pete Rose was banned for life from baseball because he bet on games that involved the team he was managing. It was also made before many players were discovered to have used performance enhancing drugs. It seems that we can’t even count on baseball anymore.

In today’s message we are going to discover what we can count on. Our text is Matthew 13:24-30. We will look at the second parable in a series of parables that Jesus told in this chapter. We will also consider Jesus’ interpretation of the parable to His disciples—Matthew 13:36-43.

1. **WE CAN COUNT ON JESUS TO DO HIS JOB.**

In some ways, this story more resembles an allegory than a parable because there are numerous elements in the story that represent certain things.

According to Jesus:

* The farm owner stands for Jesus Himself.
* The seed stands for believers, the children of the Kingdom.
* The field stands for the world.
* The enemy is Satan.
* The weeds are the children of the devil.
* The harvesters are the angels.
* The harvest is the end of the age.
* The weeds that are burned is the punishment of hell.
* The wheat gathered into the barn is the children of God enjoying the Father’s Kingdom.

The first thing I want you to notice is v. 24 and what Jesus said about it in vv. 37-38. This parable is different from the first parable in this chapter. In the first story, the seed represents the word of God, and the ones who sow the seed is you and me. So, in the first story, we plant the word of God into the hearts of people, and in the second, Jesus plants His people in this world.

Jesus told Peter in Matthew 16:18, “I will build My church.” Jesus is not going to out-source the building of His Church. He promises to do it Himself.

I want to point out that in my theology, the Church and the Kingdom are not the same thing. We cannot use those words interchangeably. Jesus did not say, “Seek ye first the Church, and all these things will be added to you.” Jesus did not teach us to pray, “Your Church come; Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

While the Church may be the visible manifestation of the Kingdom right now, the Church and the Kingdom are not the same. In my view the Church is part of the Kingdom, but the Kingdom is more inclusive than the Church.

Either way, Jesus is responsible for the building of both and the growing and the extending of both. If I believed that it was entirely up to me to grow His Church and His Kingdom, I would despair. The job would be just too big, and I am just not up to that enormous task, and no matter how confident others may be, neither are they.

If I believed that it was up to me to convince people to trust Christ, I would wilt under the fear of failure every time I tried to tell someone about Jesus. Fortunately, it is God’s job to draw people to Christ. All He wants me to do is fling the seed as I go. He will plant those in whom the seed takes root.

I want you to know Jesus is doing His job. He is planting people into His Church and Kingdom. If you are a Christian it is not primarily because you were born in the Bible belt at a time when going to church was a social expectation. It is not because your parents took you to Church when you were young. It is not because you had the good sense to realize you are a sinner and Jesus is the only One who can deal with your sin problem. The first two might have been contributing factors in your salvation, but the real reason you are a follower of Jesus is that He planted you into His Kingdom.

You are what you are and you are where you are because of Him. Jesus is doing His job, and He is not just doing that in America. Last August I went to Mexico, and I met people both young and old who lives in the mountains of southern Mexico, and God has planted them into His Kingdom.

A couple of weeks ago I was in Russia, and I met people, some of who had been drug addicts and alcoholics and some of whom were atheists, and God did a work of transformation in their lives, and He planted them into His Kingdom.

Jesus is doing that elsewhere in this world. In fact, He is doing that all over His world. He promised that in heaven there would be people from every **tribe** and **language** and **people** and **nation.** He promised that He would take them all and make them a kingdom (Revelation 5:9-10). That includes every tribe in Africa, every caste in India, every Islamic nation, and some from among all the people groups of this big, wide world.

You can trust Jesus to do His job. There is a second thing we can trust, something upon which we can rely.

1. **WE CAN COUNT ON SATAN TO DO HIS JOB.**

Just as there is work for Jesus to do, Satan is not standing in the unemployment line. He is busy doing his own work. We find what that is in v. 25 and what Jesus said about it in the end of v. 38 and v. 39.

Satan’s job is to oppose and counterfeit what Jesus is doing. The KJV uses the word *tares.* My version uses *weeds.* From my study, I learned that what Jesus was likely referring to was a weed called *darnel.* Darnel is said to look just like wheat as it is growing. It is only when they are fully grown that you can easily tell the difference. When wheat is fully grown, the head is full of grain, and the wheat bows under the weight of that grain. The darnel, however, is a noxious, poisonous plant with a smaller head. It is easy to tell the two apart when they are grown. To save the wheat, you have to go through the painstaking process of separating the two at harvest time.

The point Jesus is making is clear. Satan plants people in God’s Kingdom who are not real Christians. Early on they look like Christians. It is hard to tell them apart. There are many who talk like Christians and act like Christians and look like Christians, but they are not the real thing. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” He warned, “On that day many will say to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name, and do many mighty works in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness” (Matthew 7:21-23).

Within both the Church and the Kingdom there are make-believe Christians. Like children, they are playing dress up; they are assuming roles; they are pretending to be something they are not. They may have done this so long that they have even deluded themselves into thinking they are genuine, but they aren’t. They can fool others and even fool themselves, but they will not succeed in fooling Jesus. He knows who are really His, and who are not.

I once read, “There are two reasons why people don’t become Christians. The first is, ‘They have never met a Christian.’ They second is, ‘They have met Christians.’” Often, the problem why some do not trust Christ is they met a person who pretended to be a Christian but the life he or she lived did not match up well with what they professed to be.

You can be certain that Satan will work overtime to oppose what the Lord is doing. One of His chief ways of doing that is to plant people in God’s Kingdom who belong to him rather than Jesus.

When does Satan do this? Look again at the beginning of v. 25. When we are not being watchful, that is when the Enemy will slip in and do his mischief.

That is why four times in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus instructed His disciples, “Watch.” Three times in Mark, Jesus said, “Be on your guard.” In both Matthew and Luke, Jesus says, “Be ready.”

We have a saying in our language, “To be forewarned to be forearmed.” Jesus certainly has forewarned us that Satan is at work. Since that is the case, we need to be vigilant and aware.

We have looked at two truths:

1. We can count on Jesus to do His work—His work of growing the Kingdom.
2. We can count on Satan to do His work—His work of opposing the Kingdom.

We end our message with one simple question.

1. **CAN WE BE COUNTED ON TO DO OUR JOB?**

What is our job? Based on our text, I would say our job is two-fold. **First, we are to go to Jesus with our concerns.** Look at v. 27. Did you notice what the servants of the Master did not do? They didn’t complain to one another. They didn’t air their complaints to their neighbors. They didn’t sit and sulk about the situation. Instead, they went to their Master and said, “I think we got a problem.”

They proposed a possible solution. They asked, “Do you want us to go pull up those weeds?” They didn’t take it upon themselves to solve the problem. They went to their Master.

We are to do the same. I have spent a lifetime as a Baptist, and about half of that time, I have served as a pastor. If I have learned anything, I have learned that Baptist churches have problems, and I have the strong suspicion that those problems are not peculiar to Baptists. I think all churches have problems.

The healthy churches go to the Lord for help with their problems. The unhealthy churches react in a wide range of ways. Some ignore the problems and hope they will go away. Some look for people to blame for the problems. Some call-in specialists to solve their problems. Some try to fix the problems themselves. None of these approaches work well.

The best approach to is to go directly to Jesus, explain the problem, and listen to Him. That’s part of our job-description.

There is a second thing that happens to be our job. **Second, we are to wait patiently upon Jesus to work His will.** Jesus told the workers to wait. Our job is not to point out the weeds and try to get them out of the church. If you pour on the weed killer or fire up the weed-whacker, you are going to do far more harm than good.

When the lost claim membership in the Kingdom, you just have to wait. The Lord will sort them out in the end. Each will be put in their assigned place.

Pastor David Dykes told the following story:

In 1895 a man named Pearl Wait came up with a way to mix fruit syrup with gelatin. His wife called his concoction Jell-O. After trying to market Jell-O for a couple of years Mr. Wait couldn’t wait. He became impatient with the slow sales so he sold the rights to the recipe to his neighbor, Frank Woodward, for $450. By 1905, sales of Jell-O reached $1 million and General Foods later bought out Mr. Woodward’s Jell-O company. Today, because of his impatience, not one of Pearl Wait’s descendants get a penny of royalty from the sale of 1.1 million boxes of Jell-O sold every day.

Don’t get impatient with God. Your job and my job is to wait on Him. We will close with Psalm 37:7, 9, 34. We can wait because we know the Lord will do His job. There is no sense fretting over what Satan and his children are doing. We can count on them doing evil. Just be sure you do your job to take your case to the Lord and then wait on Him.