

Of Trigger Warnings, and Safe Zones

A sermon by Pr. David Johnson

I was intrigued the other day as I was reviewing several videos in an old computer file. I came across an old J. Warner Wallace video challenging Christians to think about what they believed. He mentioned how confused he had been as an atheist to have so many talented co-workers on the police force, who could articulate a solid case against a murderer, but couldn't seem to produce a coherent argument for their faith. His question was, "How could these bright officers formulate a well-reasoned argument for an offender's guilt, but then turn their brains off when it came to thinking through their faith? Why would I want what they had, if it didn't answer my questions sufficiently?" (*my paraphrase*)

The sad reality is that we as Christians long to live in "safe zones" every bit as much as the progressives around us. We want to live amongst friendly people, in "dissent-free" communities, who think like us and know how to play by the rules. We don't want to have our opinions challenged, and we certainly don't want to be confronted by people or perspectives that might "trigger" our sins, flaws, or inadequacies. How often don't members defer to their pastors, Sunday School teachers, or favorite apologists to answer the "hard" questions of the agnostics or faithless. After all they say, "I'm not a good debater," or "I don't handle conflict well." But none of us are off-the-hook, because the Bible challenges every believer:

Psalms 1:3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.

2 Timothy 4:2-5 ...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Likewise, the parables of Matthew 13 speak directly to this concern within the church.

Matt 13:24 Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.

What responsible farmer compromises his own fields? They use the best seed for the most productive crop. So if an earthly farmer feels this way about his material crop, how much more would Jesus, the King of the kingdom of heaven, protect His own eternal field? Jesus doesn't sow the damaging philosophies of legalism, works-righteousness, or cheap grace. He sows the pure and perfect seed of God's Word. It's the enemy who creeps in under the cloak of darkness and sows the artificial seeds on top of Jesus' pure seed.

Matt 13:25 "But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away.

This isn't as much a commentary on the failure of "his men" as it is on the sneaky and nefarious deeds of "his enemy." The enemy knows when to come, and what to use to compromise our faith, and neutralize the seed of God's Word sown in our souls.

The third soil of Jesus' previous parable explains that, "...*this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*" Even in the "good soil" of the Kingdom of Heaven, the enemy can sow compromising seeds that look, sound, and sway like *faith*, but isn't true **faith**. Satan doesn't have to be present to supervise his compromising handiwork...it's enough to simply plant the counterfeit seed. The growth happens on its own.

James 1:14-15 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

Jesus' parable continues:

Matt 13:26 "But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also.

Moses writes in Numbers 32:23, "*But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out.*" Likewise, in the Kingdom of heaven, the difference between true wheat and weeds will become glaringly obvious. You can't hide your sin forever, neither its consequences nor its nature. You will eventually be found out, and the embarrassment will be stunning.

Matt 13:27 "The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' ²⁸ "And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!'

Even the slaves knew something was up. Weeds of that kind, and of that volume, don't just happen in a good and well-tended field. Someone had to sow bad seed, so the slaves went first to the landowner, questioning his source. You can see by their question that they were fairly confident in the landowner's innocence, but they had to check the possibility off their list. How else could this mess have happened? But the owner had a pretty good idea what the problem was – "An enemy has done this!"

When bad things happen to good people, the question has to be asked, "*What did you do?*" But the victim is not always the source of the problem. Sometimes bad things happen because there are bad people, and bad circumstances in this fallen world. Do you remember Jesus' encounter with the man born blind? Those around were asking, "*Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?*" But Jesus answered, "Neither...it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him." And the landowner in Jesus' parable came to the same conclusion, reminding his slaves of the same truth.

These slaves were men of action; they wanted to DO something to fix the problem. After all... "times a wastin'"

Matt 13:28b-29 ...The slaves *said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 'But he *said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them.

We don't get the feeling that the landowner was scolding the slaves. Nor was he belittling their desire to be helpful. I'm sure he appreciated their urgency and motivation. However, he understood the ultimate damage of their offer, and as the landowner, he could see the "broader picture." The slaves were considering the short-term problem, the landowner was thinking of the long-term harvest. The slaves were focused on the temporal issues, while the landowner (*Jesus*) was focusing on Kingdom priorities.

Matt 13:30 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

The landowner understood that both plans were going to take work – and lots of it. But to tackle the weeds now, could mean damaging the real wheat. And in the end, any guess-work involved in telling the two apart will be made clearer when the wheat is mature. The Fruit (heads) will make the grain that much more obvious, when compared with the tares. The tares can then be easily identified, cut off, and bundled for the fire - while the wheat could be harvested as usual, and stored in the barn.

The moral of the story is clear, "Just because a mouse is in the cookie jar, doesn't make him a cookie." Many who claim the name of Christian, don't actually belong to Christ. Jesus Himself taught earlier in Matthew 7:

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

Sadly, there are many today who try to look like wheat, when they're actually tares. But Satan has planted them in the Kingdom...and they are weeds. They like to think that growing up in the field alongside real wheat will somehow fool the landowner. But it won't. The church is not a "safe-zone" for tares – in fact God's Word is filled with "triggers" for people who are trying to hide their true identity. But in the end, all will be revealed, and the harvest will show the real wheat from the weeds. And only the "wheat" will be put in the barn.