

Searching for Buried Treasure

Lesson for July 30, 2023

Unit II: Jesus Envisions the Kingdom

Scriptural Background: Matthew 13:44-52

Printed Text: Matthew 13:44-52

Key Verse: "He said to them, 'Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.'" (Matthew 13:52, NIV)

The Atlanta Journal Constitution, recorded the following story in the May 17, 1987 edition.

A rock-hound named Rob Cutshaw, owns a little roadside shop outside Andrews, North Carolina. Like many in the trade, he hunts for rocks, then sells them to collectors or jewelry makers. He knows enough about rocks to decide which to pick up and sell, but he's no expert. He leaves the appraising of his rocks to other people. As much as he enjoys the work, it doesn't always pay the bills. He occasionally moonlights, cutting wood to help put bread on the table.

While on a dig twenty years ago, Rob found a rock he described as "purdy and big." He tried unsuccessfully to sell the specimen, and according to the Constitution, kept the rock under his bed or in his closet. He guessed the blue chunk could bring as much as \$500 dollars, but he would have taken less if something urgent came up like paying his power bill. That's how close Rob came to hawking for a few hundred dollars what turned out to be the largest, most valuable sapphire ever found. The blue rock that Rob had abandoned to the darkness of a closet two decades ago -- now known as "The Star of David" sapphire -- weighs nearly a pound, and could easily sell for \$2.75 million.

Grace to You Newsletter, April 15, 1993

In this week's lesson Jesus continues to teach in parables. This parable, like the treasure discussed in the above story, pictures salvation as something hidden from most people, but so valuable that people who have it revealed to them are willing to give up all they have to possess it.

Key Terms

1. **Righteous** (verse 49) – Acting in accord with divine or moral law : free from guilt or sin.
2. **Treasure** (verse 44) – wealth (such as money, jewels, or precious metals) stored up or hoarded. Something of great worth or value.
3. **Wicked** (verse 49) – morally reprehensible; sinful; evil.

Lesson Background

This passage occurs in the midst of the period of time in which the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders has reached a peak. They have falsely accused Him of breaking the Law of Moses and of doing His work by the power of the devil. Jesus has strongly rebuked them, showing He is perfect in keeping with the law and that what He has done could only have been done by the power of God. Jesus is now teaching the multitudes using parables so that, as it says in Matthew 13:11-17, He could reveal truth to His followers while at the same time concealing that truth from His enemies though both heard the same thing.

Jesus' followers gain understanding through both the ministry of the Holy Spirit who enlightens their minds and the further explanations that Jesus gives to them in private. Jesus' enemies lose even what understanding they did have of the Old Testament prophecies because they are limited to their own wisdom and the devil blinds their minds to the truth.

These mysteries being revealed here are set in contrast to the general understanding of Biblical prophecy at that time, which expected the Messiah to come as a powerful conquering king who comes with an army to put down Roman rule and establish Jerusalem as the power center of the world. They expected Him to have no toleration for His enemies and to bring many blessings upon all Jewish people.

What are the mysteries already revealed in the parables we examined so far? The parable of the sower showed that the kingdom would not come as a military takeover, but through the proclamation of a message to which only a small percentage would even respond. (See: The Parable of the Sower) The parable of the tares among the wheat showed that in the coming kingdom there would be toleration for the enemies of God, though eventually there will be judgment upon them. The parable of the Mustard Seed showed that the kingdom would not start as a large force, but instead as a very small entity, but it would become a very large entity that would be a blessing to all. And the parable of the Leaven demonstrated not only the small size of the kingdom in the beginning, but also that the kingdom would expand through its internal influence, not an outward oppression of its enemies.

Lesson in Depth

I. Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44-46)

In a society that had no banks or safety-deposit boxes, all one could do with valuables was hide them underground. Archaeologists have often found jars of gold coins or even precious jewels and pearls buried in a field. This parable would be such a case, as the original owners were either killed on a journey or died suddenly and the treasure remained hidden. It is a story that captures the imagination in every culture and time, for buried treasure is a universal symbol of personal fortune.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field: The field is the world, but the **man** does not represent the believer, because we have nothing to buy this treasure with. Instead, Jesus is the **man** who gave all that He had to buy the field.

“Under rabbinic law if a workman came on a treasure in a field and lifted it out, it would belong to his master, the field’s owner; but here the man is careful not to lift the treasure out till he has bought the field.” (Carson)

This parable and the one following are different in character than the previous three. The previous three parables (the wheat and the tares, the mustard seed, and the leaven) each spoke of corruption in the kingdom community. These two parables speak of how highly the King values the people of His kingdom.

And for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field: In this parable, the great point is the joy of the discovery that made the man willing to give up everything to make sure beyond question that the treasure became his own. Nothing else in the parable really matters. The **treasure** so wonderful that Jesus would give all to purchase is *the individual believer*. This powerfully shows how Jesus gave everything to redeem the whole world to preserve a treasure in it, and the treasure is His people.

“Finding the treasure appears to be by chance. In a land as frequently ravaged as Palestine, many people doubtless buried their treasures; but to actually find a treasure would happen once in a thousand lifetimes. Thus, the extravagance of the parable dramatizes the supreme importance of the kingdom.” (Carson)

“So did Jesus himself, at the utmost cost, buy the world to gain his church, which was the treasure which he desired.” (Spurgeon)

Joy is an important part of this story. The man does not go dutifully off to sell his possessions but does so at the sheer joy of discovering the treasure. He is not upset that he has to go and sell everything. In fact, he doesn’t have to go and sell anything at all. He does it because he wants to. He does it because he is glad to. He is so full of joy at the discovery of the treasure that he is glad to sell everything he has in order to obtain the treasure.

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls: The kingdom is the pearl. And the man is the believer who is awakened and is looking for the answer to that which the Holy Spirit has awakened in his heart. So if the kingdom is the pearl, and after all, he does say the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant man seeking fine pearls, then we can make these points.

The kingdom is the loveliest of all possessions. This man, incidentally, was a professional. He was a professional pearl hunter. He was a merchant man. He was a jeweler. He knew pearls. And he went around, according to this parable, looking for the finest of pearls. And with all of his professional knowledge, he finally set upon one pearl of great price, the Lord Jesus trying by that to stress the greatness and the loveliness of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. And notice it is one pearl of great price – one pearl, not many – one pearl of great price.

Again, Jesus is the buyer and the individual believer is the pearl that He sees as so valuable that He would happily give all to have it forever.

“To the ancient peoples, as we have just seen, a pearl was the loveliest of all possessions; that means that the Kingdom of Heaven is the loveliest thing in the world.” (Barclay)

One pearl of great price: Since pearls come in a great range of qualities and sizes, by far the highest value will attach to the best of the pearls. The merchant finds a pearl which is so outstanding that the wealthiest of buyers will vie for its ownership. For him this will be the business deal of a lifetime! But to buy such a pearl will stretch his resources to the limit: only by liquidating all his assets can he raise the capital to close the deal. The opportunity is too good to lose, he acts decisively and secures the pearl.

It seems crazy for a merchant to sell **all that he had** for one pearl, but for this merchant it was well worth it. That shows how much he valued this **pearl of great price**, and how much Jesus values His people.

The common points in both the treasure and the pearl stories include the discovery of an object of surpassing value, going away to sell everything the finder possesses, and the purchase of the field (treasure)/pearl. Both discoveries—one apparently accidental, the other part of an intentional search—yield knowledge that remains hidden or undisclosed to others. The two finders have been possessed, as it were, by the perception of something that the rest of the world does not see. The two finders are thus like those to whom “*it has been given to know the secrets of the empire of the heavens*” (13:11). Jesus’ disciples have discovered “*what has been hidden*” (13:35) and what “*many prophets and righteous ones have longed to see ... and hear*” but did not see or hear (13:17).

II. Separating the Wicked from Righteous (Matthew 13:47-50)

This is a warning parable. It is a clarion call to all who hear not to ignore or reject the call of Christ but to make every effort to enter God’s kingdom while you still may. Yes, God allows evil and sin to continue in the world for now, but the final judgment is coming when God will judge all evil and sin, and those outside of God’s kingdom will be punished for their sins.

So, there are quite a few similarities between the parable of the weeds and the parable of the net. The main difference between the two is a difference of emphasis. The parable of the weeds focuses more on the co-existing of good and evil in this present world, whereas the parable of the net focuses more on the separation of good and evil at the end of the age.

The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet: Jesus shows that the world will remain divided right up until the end, and the Church will not reform the world, ushering in the kingdom.

So it will be at the end of the age: There will be both the **wicked** and the **just** until the end of the age (as also demonstrated in the previous parable of the wheat and the tares). At that time **the angels will come forth** and assist the King in the work of judgment, sending some **into the furnace of fire** for final judgment.

“The reference, as in the weeds, is not primarily to a mixed church, but to the division among mankind in general which the last judgment will bring to light.” (France)

According to Warren Wiersbe: The preaching of the gospel in the world does not convert the world. It is like a huge dragnet that gathers all kinds of fish, some good and some bad. The professing church today has in it both true and false believers (the parable of the tares) and good and bad. At the end of the age, God will separate the true believers from the false and the good from the bad. When Jesus Christ returns to earth to fight the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 19:11), He will separate believers and unbelievers already on the earth. These are living people who are not a part of the church (which was already in heaven) or Israel. These Gentiles will be dealt with in righteousness: The saved will enter into the kingdom, but the unsaved will be cast into the furnace of fire. The same idea is found in the “sheep and goats” parable (Matthew 25:32).

Twice in this series of parables Jesus used the phrase “the end of the world” (Matthew 13:39, 49). He was not referring to the end of this “church age,” because the truth about the church was not shared with the disciples until later (Matthew 16:18). The “age” He referred to is the Jewish age at the close of the great tribulation described in Matthew 24:1–31 and Revelation 6—19. We must be careful not to “read into” these passages in Matthew the truths later given through Paul and the other apostles.

Notice a couple key differences between this earlier parable and the parable under consideration:

- Whereas the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares focuses upon the intervening time between Jesus’ inauguration of the kingdom and the end of the age, during which both He and the devil are at work in the world, leading up to a final judgment, the focus of the Parable of the Dragnet is on the future judgment itself.
- Whereas the Parable of the Wheat and the tares includes the destruction of the wicked, but lays stress in the end upon the way in which “the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father,” thus emphasizing the promise of a glorious future for believers, the Parable of the Dragnet places the emphasis upon the destruction of the wicked. So, the primary focus of this parable is the future and final judgment of the wicked.

III. Bringing Out the Treasure – New and Old (Matthew 13:51-52)

Jesus concludes his parable discourse by raising again the issue of understanding (v. 51) and by telling a parable about the task of those who understand (v. 52). Like the parable of the sower, this parable talks about communication—and in fact forms an inclusion with 13:3-9. The specific topic here is the role of the scribe, one who interprets God’s word for others (compare the portrait of a scribe in Sirach 39:1-11, a portrait with which Matthew appears to be familiar). According to Matthew, there are scribes trained for the kingdom of heaven (the word for trained is related to the word for disciple), just as there were scribes in the Jewish community.

But who exactly does Matthew have in mind? In the broadest sense, every believer who studies and interprets the word is a scribe. In a narrower sense, scribe may refer to teachers who function like rabbis in Jesus' community (compare 23:34).

They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." We wonder if the disciples really did understand Jesus here. However, Jesus did not deny their claim to understand.

Assuming that the disciples did understand, they had an advantage over many among the multitudes. "The multitude went away (as most people do from sermons) never the wiser, understanding nothing of what they heard, nor caring to understand it." (Poole)

Every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom: Jesus said that everyone who really knows God's Word both will know the **old** and learn the **new** of the kingdom. "He is not weary of the *old*; he is not afraid of the *new*." (Spurgeon)

Every scribe: Jesus used the term here simply to describe a teacher. "The scribes amongst the Jews were not only clerks, that were employed in writing, but teachers of the law; such a one was Ezra (Ezra 7:6)." (Poole)

The main idea is that the disciples – who had just claimed to understand what Jesus taught – are now responsible to bring forth their understanding to others, as if they were distributing from the storehouse of their wisdom and understanding. This storehouse contains **things new and old**.

When Jesus had completed this series of parables, He asked His disciples if they understood them, and they confidently replied, "Yes, Lord." Understanding involves responsibility. To explain this, the Lord added a final parable (Matt. 13:51–52) to remind them of their responsibilities.

They must be scribes who discover the truth. The scribes began as a noble group under the leadership of Ezra. Their purpose was to preserve the law, study it, and apply its truths to daily life. Over the years, their noble cause degenerated into a routine task of preserving traditions and man-made interpretations and adding burdens to the lives of the people (Luke 11:46–52). They were so wrapped up in the past that they ignored the present! Instead of sharing living truth from God's Word, they merchandised dead doctrines and "embalmed" traditions that could not help the people.

As believers, we do not search after truth, because we have truth in God's Son (John 14:6) and God's Word (John 17:17). We are taught by the Spirit of Truth (John 16:13) who is truth (1 John 5:6). We search into truth that we might discover more truth. We are scribes—students—who sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to His words. One joy of the Christian life is the privilege of learning God's truth from God's Word. But we must not stop there.

They must be disciples who do the truth. "*Therefore every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven*" is a more accurate translation of Matthew 13:52. The scribe emphasizes learning, but the disciple emphasizes living. Disciples are doers of the Word (James 1:22), and they learn by doing. It is difficult to keep our lives balanced. We often emphasize learning at the expense of living. Or, we may get so busy serving God that we do not take time to listen to His Word. Every scribe must be a disciple, and every disciple must be a scribe.

They must be stewards who dispense the truth. The scribes preserved the law but did not invest it in the lives of the people. The treasure of the law was encrusted by man's traditions. The seed was not planted so it could bear fruit. The "spiritual gold and silver" was not put to work so it could produce dividends.

The steward guards the treasure, but he also dispenses it as it is needed. He dispenses both the old and the new. New principles and insights are based on old truths. The new cannot contradict the old because the old comes out of the new (Leviticus 26:10). The new without the old is mere novelty and will not last. But the old does no good unless it is given new applications in life today. We need both.

Lesson Summary

There are three parables in this week's lesson. The point of each parable is the same – the kingdom of God is something that has to be personally appropriated to receive its benefits. You are not going to be part of it based on your genealogical history. This was the mystery being revealed.

The difference between the first two parables is that in the first, the person stumbles onto the treasure; while in the second, the merchant had been diligently looking for it. This is the way in which salvation comes to individuals. Some have diligently been searching for the truth before they find it in Jesus Christ. Others have just been living their lives without much thought to eternal things when they, from the human point of view, stumble into Christ and find the answer to the question that they had not even been asking – what is life all about?

God uses a variety of circumstances to bring the treasure of the kingdom of God – eternal life in Jesus Christ – to an individual, but there is only one way by which that individual can partake of what is being offered. In both parables, the man and the merchant recognized the supreme value of what they had discovered and everything else became secondary to taking possession of what they found. They "sold all they had" with nothing held back. The same is true in salvation. There is a transaction that takes place.

That sounds a bit like salvation being purchased or earned – which is not true. The Scriptures are clear that the purchase price is beyond us and has been paid for us by Jesus Christ. We cannot earn it. We cannot buy it. But there IS a transaction that takes place in salvation. The old is exchanged for the new.

The exchange is your bad for God's good. Return to the Lord and He will have compassion and grant pardon. It is a simple matter of turning from your path of sinfulness that leads to death, and turning to the Lord and He will forgive and lead you on the path to life. Life in Christ costs you nothing in the sense of paying for it, but it costs you everything in the sense of surrender. You yield your will to His because you have come to believe the truth about Him. The value of the kingdom of heaven is so great that everything else is worthless in comparison.

The third parable, Matthew 13:47-50, has the same point as the parable of the wheat and the tares except for the emphasis is not on the fact that the good and bad are now mixed together, but rather the emphasis is on the judgment at the end when the good and bad will be separated. The explanation of the parable at the end is the same as that in the wheat and the tares.

God is longsuffering and not willing that any should perish but that all should repent (2 Peter 3:9), that is why He is so tolerant of sin and sinful men and women at this present time, but a day is coming in which His period of patience will end and judgment will come. That judgment will seem quick when it comes, but that is only because sinful man refuses to see the warning signs. A fish swimming through the water does not think twice about a net should it happen to bump into it. It simply swims away from it thinking itself to be free. But slowly, the net draws around it and only as that net closes together do the fish become excited and start thrashing about, but by then it is too late.

The scriptures warn in Romans that God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteous men. Those displays are only warnings of what is to come against the ungodly.

What is the value of the kingdom of heaven? Everything! There should be no higher pursuit than making sure that you are part of it and then serving within it. God is holy and just, and He will punish those who will not follow Him. Hell is a real place. But God is also loving from which extends His grace and mercy, and He has provided the means by which all men and women can escape the doom of Hell and gain the joy of heaven simply by turning to Him. But you cannot do that and hold onto doing things your own way, but what cost is that in view of the value of Life in Christ and the utter contrast between heaven and hell? If you do not personally know Jesus Christ as your Lord and savior, then you have been warned that your destiny is eternal Hell unless you follow the advice given Isaiah 55:6, 7 which was read earlier, *"Seek the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."*

In Matthew 13:51 Jesus asks the disciples if they understood what He was talking about. They answered that they did. Then in Matthew 13:52 Jesus says to them, *"Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old."*

Jesus tells them that since they have understood both the Old Testament and these new truths about the kingdom of God, then they should be like the head of a household that provides for his family by giving them what is needed. They should provide eternal life to others by teaching them what they have learned – that God has provided a way of salvation to people who are currently on the path to Hell.