

The Parables of Jesus

Lesson 7: The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and Pearl of Great Price

Introduction

Continuing the theme of the Parables of the Kingdom, we now look at what Jesus teaches about *the value* and the kingdom of God. These two short parables, found in Matthew 13:44-46, focus on the surpassing worth of the Kingdom of God. These two short parables are only found in the Gospel of Matthew.

The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

Matthew 13:44-45 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

First-Century Context of the Parables

Hidden Treasure in a Field:

In the ancient world, burying treasure was a common way to protect valuables, especially in times of war or instability. Israel, frequently invaded by foreign powers, had many instances where people buried their wealth and died before retrieving it. According to Jewish law (in the Mishnah), if someone found hidden treasure in land they owned, it became theirs.

Pearl Merchants:

Pearls were among the most valuable commodities in the ancient world. They were sought after by the wealthy and could cost a fortune. Unlike today, pearls were rarer than diamonds and were often imported from the Persian Gulf, India, or the Red Sea. Merchants would travel great distances to find the finest pearls, making this parable relatable to Jesus' audience.

Explaining the Parables

Matthew 13:44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."

1. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44)

- **"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field."**
 - The Kingdom is not immediately visible; it must be discovered, going back to our previous parable of the Kingdom's 'hiddenness'
 - Because it's a treasure, the emphasis is the Kingdom's great value. He hid it again, so that others would not come along and steal the treasure.
- **"When a man found it, he hid it again."**
 - The man does not steal the treasure but aims to secure it legally by purchasing the field.
 - This emphasizes the joy and secrecy involved in embracing the Kingdom.
- **"Then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."**
 - The phrase "in his joy" is key—it shows the joy in finding the Kingdom, and that his sacrifice in selling all that he has is not reluctant but a joyful act. (unlike the Rich Young Ruler)
 - The man recognizes the treasure's worth and willingly surrenders everything to obtain it.

2. The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price (Matthew 13:45-46)

Matthew 13:45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

- "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls."
 - Unlike the man who stumbles upon treasure, the merchant is actively searching for fine pearls.
 - This could indicate some people come to the Kingdom unexpectedly, while others seek after truth.
- "When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."
 - The merchant immediately recognizes the pearl's supreme value.
 - The Kingdom is not just *a* treasure—it is *the* ultimate treasure, worth total commitment.

Key Themes and Theological Implications

It seems natural to formulate the parables' message in one short sentence: *The kingdom of God is so valuable that it is worth sacrificing anything to gain it.*

1. The Surpassing Value of the Kingdom: The Kingdom is of such immense worth that giving up everything else for it is a joyful exchange. This aligns with Paul's statement in Philippians 3:7-8: "Whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ."

2. Different Ways of Discovering the Kingdom: The parables show two different ways people enter the Kingdom:

1. **By Unexpected Discovery** – Some encounter the Kingdom suddenly (e.g., Paul on the road to Damascus).
2. **By Diligent Seeking** – Others search for truth and find the Kingdom after a long journey (e.g., the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8).

3. The Cost of Discipleship: Both parables seem to emphasize that following Christ requires total commitment. This echoes Jesus' words in Luke 9:23: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." However, the cost is not a burden—it is a joy (Matt. 13:44).

Application to the First-Century Audience

Many Jews expected the Kingdom to arrive with visible power and military conquest. Jesus' teaching challenged this by showing that the Kingdom is hidden and must be sought out. His audience would have understood the radical nature of these parables: following Jesus required reordering one's entire life around Him.

Alternative View of the Parables

In one sense, this interpretation of these parables lines up with Jesus' teaching on sacrifice and commitment to following him. In challenges to the rich young ruler, to the fact that the disciples left everything to follow Jesus, and phrases like 'take up your cross', to other sayings that indicate the radical demand of commitment to follow Jesus.

However, others have pointed out that you cannot receive the Kingdom (salvation) by 'buying it' or on the basis of self-commitment and see this parable through the lens of Christ's work on the cross for salvation.

This view would see the person who finds the treasure and searches for the treasure is Jesus, the field is the world, the treasure is people, and the purchasing is through the blood of Christ's death.

1. Christ is the One Who Finds the Treasure (Not Us): Traditional teaching suggests that *we* are the seekers who must give up everything to gain Christ, which can align with Jesus' words of discipleship but not receiving salvation. The emphasis here is that *God is the seeker*, and *we* are the treasure. Jesus joyfully gave Himself to redeem us. This aligns with Jesus' mission: "*The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*" (Luke 19:10).

2. The Pearl of Great Price Represents Our Value in God's Eyes: In the same way, the parable of the pearl shows a merchant (Jesus) searching for something of immense value (us). He gives everything to acquire it. The purchase price? His own blood (1 Peter 1:18-19).

3. The Gospel is a Gift, Not a Transaction: This view would stress that salvation is *not a trade*, but a gift. Jesus gave all to redeem us, and we receive this by grace, not by sacrificing or striving.

4. We Already Have the Kingdom in Christ: Many Christians fear they haven't "given up enough" or "sacrificed enough" for Jesus. But in the New Covenant, we are not called to *strive* to gain the kingdom; we are *already in* the kingdom by grace. *Colossians 1:13* – "*For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.*" We are not trying to *buy our way in*—we are already *bought with a price* (1 Cor. 6:20).

This view lines up with the theme of God seeking the lost (such as in the Parable of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, etc.). It also emphasized the Gospel is not about human effort or something we can buy or earn. The purchase price also matches Jesus' costly sacrifice. It also carries the consistency of Old Testament imagery where God's people were described as God's 'treasured possession' (Ex. 19:5, Deut. 7:6, Mal 3:17)

Application to the Church Today

I do believe there is truth and merit to both interpretations. The key is to see the 'cost' of following Jesus as our response to the gift of receiving the Kingdom and Christ by grace. While salvation is free, following Christ should be a joyful commitment.

1. Recognizing the Kingdom's Value: Do we truly see the Kingdom as our highest treasure? Many people pursue wealth, success, and comfort, failing to recognize that God's Kingdom is of infinitely greater worth.

2. The Joy of Sacrifice: Christianity is not about begrudgingly following rules but about joyfully embracing the treasure of Christ. When we understand the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus, sacrifice becomes joy (Phil. 3:8).

3. Total Commitment to Christ: These parables challenge cultural Christianity, which often treats faith as a convenience rather than the commitment of our lives. Jesus calls us to "*sell all*"—to let go of competing priorities and embrace Him fully.

4. All This Comes by Grace: While all of this is true, we should always see salvation as a gift that is to be received, not something to be earned. We should value Christ's ultimate sacrifice for our sins and make our sacrifices the response to God's goodness.

Keeping all this in perspective can help us to see and live out the truths of both of these interpretations.