

Parables Lesson 13: What is the Kingdom like? It is valuable.

Continuing our look at the Kingdom of God we come to two parables that explain its worth or value. Remember the Kingdom of God in the New Testament refers to the universal church, the body of Christ, the holy nation made up of all believers, where God rules and His sovereign will is done.

Today's parables are twins. They are virtually identical with minor difference only in their coloring:

Two men encounter the chance of a lifetime.

Both give up all they have to pursue the opportunity.

Both get what they seek.

There is some argument as to the proper interpretation of these stories but one thing is certain. The Kingdom of God as illustrated by a treasure and a pearl is priceless in value and worth.

THE BURRIED TREASURE

Matthew 13:44

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Matthew 13: 45 and 46

Introduction:

People are attracted by stories of buried treasure. Wealthy men have often put their entire fortunes at risk searching for lost mines, pirate treasure, or sunken ships.

It was no different in Jesus' time. Historians write of men forsaking their training, trades, and families to become full time treasure hunters. Most lost their shirts, some got rich.

Even today archeologists in Palestine report hostility from villagers who suspect they are digging, not to recreate history, but because they know of some long lost buried treasure.

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This first parable is completely realistic.

There were many moneylenders but few banks and few safe places to hide money so burying treasure was a common way of protecting it. Remember in the parable of the talents, the foolish steward buried his money to keep from losing it.

So someone, sometime, somewhere buries a treasure. And Jesus picks up the story right here:

THE STORY: The Buried Treasure--Read Matthew 13:44

Treasure Found

Life as usual

Years later a dirt poor farmer, a share cropper, eking out a meager existence scrapping at a rented piece of land in a never ending cycle of back breaking, spirit crushing work.

One day he gets up to face another exhausting, boring, monotonous and tedious day following the plow as his ox pulls it through the rocky soil.

The plow hits something hard, another rock to be cleared, another obstacle to dig out and remove, another nuisance to add to his toil.

The unusual happens

He kneels to look and finds, not a rock, but a box with a long plow scar across its lid. A chest of some kind sealed with pitch and bound by rotting leather straps.

He digs it up, pries open the lid, and catches his breath. For there, wrapped in oilcloth, is gold and jewels, truly a king's ransom.

Treasure Claimed

Moral Decision

What should he do? Who owns the treasure? Is he bound by law to turn this treasure over to the owner of the land? Not necessarily.

In Edersheim's fine book, *Life and Times of Jesus, The Messiah*, he explains that under Roman and Jewish law in effect at that time "anything" found by "anybody" could be claimed by the finder if he could successfully buy the land in which it was housed.

And so, the farmer elatedly re-buries the treasure, runs home to his wife and they begin to sell everything they own to raise money, furniture, animals, and treasured objects, all they possess.

Physical Decision

He then goes to town to buy the field. Cost is no object. He doesn't even haggle as he normally would. He gladly gives everything he has to buy the field. Why? Because he knows it contains great treasure.

THE STORY: The Pearl of Great Price--Read Matt. 13:45-46

Pearl Sought

What is a pearl?

A pearl is actually formed by a chemical that is in an oyster's body. It is caused to form when foreign matter, either sand or a parasite, finds its way into the shell and injures the oyster.

The injury causes the oyster to secrete a substance called "nacre" or "mother of pearl" in layers until the smooth surface of the object ceases to cause a problem. This is a pearl.

What was a pearl's value?

There is no mention of pearls in the Old Testament but in Jesus' time they were very precious. In fact, we have historical record of Cleopatra having a pair set in earrings worth over \$400,000 each. In fact one of the stories from her life is that she dissolved one of them in vinegar and drank it to show her love for Marc Anthony.

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Additional mystical value.

In the oriental mind, with its fascination with the concept and creation of beauty, the pearl was beyond financial worth. It was mystical, magical, something to be treasured. To hold it, feel it, see its color, turn it slowly and watch the colors change was an ultimate delight.

History and fiction from this time often told of merchants who searched the known world for "the perfect pearl."

Pearl Found

The Oriental Bazaar

The Oriental Bazaar was the center of daily activity. Everybody dressed up to go to town much like they did when I was a child in the mid-west. The purpose was to shop and window shop, to watch people and have a snack. It was all very much like going to the mall.

But, there was more. It was the sights, the sounds, and the smells. The stores were tents, the cars were horses, camels, and ox carts. People also caught up on the news and met others for sharing gossip.

Buying at the bazaar

There were no fixed prices. You were there to bargain.

You ask a price and the merchant sizes you up and names a price twice as high as he actually wants.

You give him a price that is less than half of what you are willing to pay and the fun of haggling begins. **(Maria story)**

There is much gesturing and appeals to heaven and various gods to protect them from being swindled. There is shouting and insults to ancestors who would sire robbers and criminals.

But when the deal was struck everybody was happy. The merchant just knew he has sold his product for more than it was worth and the customer just knew he had forced the seller to sacrifice. Such a deal! **(Guadalajara, Mexico experience)**

Enter the Pearl Merchant of our story.

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The word goes out that a true pearl merchant is in the bazaar. He has traveled the world, has stories to tell, has a lot of money and he is looking for bargains.

As he wanders among the pearl stalls he suddenly sees it, a large, lustrous, iridescent, perfectly formed, pearl. It is

THE PEARL.

He casually walks over, checks several other pearls, and indifferently picks up THE PEARL. He asks the price of several items, including THE PEARL careful not to let his excitement show.

With careful bargaining he just might get THE PEARL. He takes out a pouch and dumps some diamonds, rubies, emeralds and smaller pearls into a pile, but the merchant just laughs. He adds other precious stones to the pile, no deal.

He scoops up his precious treasures and starts to leave. "Don't go, you're very close," says the dealer. And so he pulls out his special pouch, his very valuable collection of pearls gathered from all over the world.

A deal is struck. It has cost him everything, but he has THE PRICELESS PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

THE LESSON (The kingdom of heaven [God] is like.)

The Possibilities

In the footnote of *The Ryrie Study Bible* there is a perfect and concise statement of the two possible interpretations of this parable:

"The parable of the treasure indicates the incomparable value of the kingdom, which will cause a man to do anything possible to possess it. Another possible interpretation equates the man with Christ (as is done in the parable of the sower of good seed in v. 37) who sacrifices His all to purchase His people.

Most Bible scholars agree with one or the other of these:

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Interpretation One

The treasure is Christ and His salvation (His Kingdom) that is worth all a man has to obtain it. (Flood, Lightfoot, Morgan)

Edmund Flood puts it this way; "The situation that Jesus has obviously in mind here is that of His coming to men, which was the coming of God's Kingdom. It is this that is a chance of a lifetime, the inestimable treasure"

The treasure and/or pearl is Jesus (His Kingdom) and man should seek him and be willing to give all (as the disciples did) to follow him. He might be found by chance as the treasure was or by seeking as the pearl but it is worth everything to obtain.

Interpretation Two

The treasure is man (His Kingdom) who Jesus bought at the great price of giving up everything He rightfully owned to purchase it. (Spurgeon, Lockyer)

Christ is the one who came "to seek and to save that which was lost."--Luke 19:10 In Greek the work seeking indicates leaving home to go far to find. This matches the Philippians passage, the kynosis.

The Best Possibility

It is obvious the worth of the kingdom is beyond price ("What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul"), but how does that play out in this parable.

There is no price that a man can pay to receive his own salvation. Obtaining the kingdom is a work of God from before the foundation of the world to beyond the end of the world. I, therefore, find it hard to accept that this parable relates that man will give all to gain Christ and His salvation.

It seems more likely to me that it is a picture of Jesus giving up everything He was and had to seek and save that which was lost.

Phil. 2:5-8 "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, {and} being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

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John MacArthur deals with this dilemma by stating, "the treasure as salvation, something hidden from most people but so valuable that *those who have it revealed to them* are willing to give up all they have to possess it."

Perhaps the key to this problem is to follow our own advice in the introduction to this series and avoid any allegorizing at all. The lesson then is simply this:

The Kingdom of God is of incalculable worth. Jesus gave His all to bring access to the kingdom to us and we should be willing to give all to promote and further that Kingdom as well.

Matthew 6:33--"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.