

Storehouses and Treasures New and Old

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- [0 : 00] We've all been sitting for a while, so why don't we stand and I'll pray for us before we come to God's Word. Our Father, please give us ears to hear and minds to understand and hearts to rejoice at the wonders of your truth.
- Help me to speak this word with humility and wisdom, acknowledging that it is only with the assistance of your Holy Spirit that we can discern anything of your will, your character, and your purpose.
- In Jesus' name, Amen. Please take a seat. As you would have got from our second reading, we're back in Matthew 13, and there we have found Jesus teaching both the people and his disciples in narrative form, using parables.
- Now, parables are stories with a distinct meaning, a meaning that is grantedly often hard for us to discern.
- But we must reiterate, before we proceed any further, that parables are not allegories, allegories like Pilgrim's Progress, where every component of that story is ascribed a specific meaning or purpose.
- [1 : 34] Rather, parables are stories that make a single underlying point, a point which we need to comprehend, and it's not productive, therefore, to try to allocate complicated interpretations to every moving part of the story.
- The previous parables in chapter 13, the sower, the weeds, the mustard seed, these were all intended to give hope to those listeners who couldn't understand why there was a delay in the kingdom, in the appearing of that kingdom.
- And so, then, today, we come to the last four in this discourse in chapter 13. While we're not entirely sure who the audience is, we do know that these parables are primarily intended to enable the disciples to identify those who show that they have discovered the truth about the kingdom, and also to motivate them to continue proclaiming the truth of the kingdom.
- As with all Jesus' parables, these ones are grounded in the situation that people can relate to, in the events of every day.
- You might not even have realized there were four parables in that reading. Ours today are short and simple stories. The first two parables seem to be saying, So we'll look at them together.
- [3 : 44] Verse 44, Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.
- When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. Finding buried treasure has always been a device for a good story.
- The pirate stories of old. Even Enid Blyton, if I remember correctly. And in our first one, our first story, we have a man who is most probably laboring in another man's field, who accidentally, he wasn't planning this, comes across a discovery of immense treasure.
- This is a time with no bank vaults or security systems. So it was quite common for the well-off to hide their wealth in a hole in the ground.

Especially in the face of the threat of war or banditry or any other kind of unpleasantness. You might even recall that the wicked servant in one of Jesus' other parables hid his master's talent of gold, which is about a year's wages, in the ground rather than investing it.

[5 : 22] So this is not an uncommon thought to those who were listening to Jesus. I think we can also conclude that the treasure most likely does not belong to the field's owner, but more probably to some forgotten predecessor.

He hid the gold, something happened to him, and it's lay there for perhaps many generations. The man immediately covers up the hole and conceals his find.

Because otherwise, had he lifted this treasure out of the ground, under both Jewish and Roman law, it would have rightfully belonged to the current owner of the field.

And at best, he might have got a small reward for his troubles. We might consider this an act of questionable morality. But as I mentioned already, this is a parable.

It's not intended for us to build an ethical model on the merits or demerits of this man's action. Instead, it is for us to focus on the sheer level of self-interest he displays.

[6 : 36] The man goes away. He sells absolutely everything he has. Acquires the field and with it the treasure. What is more, Jesus tells us, he joyfully sells all he has.

Why? Because clearly, the value of the treasure that he has found massively exceeds all of that which he gave up to obtain it.

It was obvious to the man. In the second story, we find a merchant. This is a man who deals in fine pearls.

And therefore, he's a man who knows his subject and who knows what he's looking for. This man, in his dealings, comes across that pearl which is incomparable to anything he has ever seen.

He has to possess it. It has to be his. To obtain it, he is willing to sacrifice everything he has. Like the first man.

[7 : 46] He sells off all his other pearls. He gives his entire business and all his property away. Why? In the face of owning this one magnificent object, everything else is mundane and valueless.

Once he has cited that over which he truly obsesses, nothing can stop him. Quite conceivably, there would have been other merchants who might have considered purchasing the pearl that's before him.

But for these, the cost of that acquisition was too high. They were happy to keep what they had, their lesser pearls, their continuing trading operations.

So what then are we to make of these two stories? In what way are they like the kingdom of heaven? From the outset, we have to say that these two parables describe those who have attained the kingdom.

Those for whom it is of incomparable worth and who, as a result, are driven by the truth of the kingdom to complete and wholehearted devotion to it.

[9 : 15] I mentioned at the beginning that parables, with parables, we look for the underlying message. And the underlying message here is this. Belonging to the kingdom of God and possessing the salvation that comes as part of that is worth more than anything we have given up.

Every carnal and worldly delight, the esteem of the world, the rewards of this earthly life. It is worth more too than every trouble that we might have to suffer on account of the gospel, the ridicule we might face, the loss of friends and family, the frustration of seeing the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer.

These parables describe the kind of people who have been made alive by Christ. Having discovered the truth of the kingdom, there is nothing they will not do to ensure their place in that kingdom.

They have one-track minds you might ask me though, what was the reason for Jesus to repeat this parable in different form?

I think it is because there are some in the kingdom who are like the man who found the treasure hidden inadvertently. While there are others who are more like the merchant who long and diligently sorted everywhere.

[11 : 05] The first represents so many who, having no interest in the things of Christ, when they encounter it are arrested by the gospel, acknowledging that they are sinners, sinners in need of a savior, their response to Jesus is one of joy and the change in their lives is immediately apparent to all.

The second man could as equally be those who have grown up in the church, have been surrounded by the message, they've seen the pearls of lesser value, or those who have sought answers in different ways in many religions.

Christians. We heard a testimony in the baptism today of one who sought answers everywhere. But they, too, like she already said, know, must, also show that same evidence of responding with joy and purpose when the veil is lifted and the truth is made known.

both men recognized value when they found it. Both men determined to have it. Both men gave up everything to be able to buy it.

And both acquired the treasure. It's important to note that in neither case is the understanding obtained anything to do with human effort at all.

[12 : 47] rather, what was once hidden or unattainable has now been revealed. And having that revelation, the disciple can do no other than wholeheartedly giving in and following Jesus.

D.A. Carson says, the kingdom is worth infinitely more than the cost of discipleship. the kingdom is worth infinitely more than the cost of discipleship.

And those who know where the treasure lies joyfully abandon everything else to secure it. I have to stop and ask, is that true of you?

Are you thoroughly persuaded about the merits of Christ and his gospel of salvation? salvation? Is it the single most valuable thing in your life?

If not, I advise you to consider again and determine if you really are a member of the kingdom of God. many of those who have had priceless treasure shown to them through the preaching of this gospel, but have instead walked away, sadly choosing to keep their worldly valuables and remaining in spiritual poverty.

[14 : 16] My hope is that it is not true of any here today, but the next parable tells me that this is highly unlikely. Turning to that third parable, we see in verse 47, once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.

When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in the baskets but threw the bad away.

This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

the and the the earlier one, the parable of the weeds, which can also be found in chapter 13.

Both are stories about a coming reckoning where the bad stuff, wheat and tares, or tares and bad fish, will be separated from the good stuff, the wheat and the good fish.

[15 : 42] And then that bad stuff will also be discarded or destroyed. However, both parables also highlight that this judgment still lies in the future.

And until that time, the good will coexist with the bad. In the parable, Jesus describes a net that would have been a drag net of the kind that has been used on the lake from before the time of Christ until relatively recently.

About 250 to 300 meters long, 10 meters in the middle down to about 2 meters at the ends. It had a rope at the top and at the bottom.

The bottom had sinkers to keep it submerged and corks on the top so that it would float. and thus it made a net wall. And as it was dragged towards the shore, it would indiscriminately capture literally all the fish, any and all fish in its ambit.

Definitely wouldn't be allowed today given the nature of the fishing regulations. nations. But in those days, this story would have made complete sense to most of those listening on the Galilean shore.

[17 : 11] Because separating good fish from bad fish, whether those bad fish were sickly or richly forbidden, would have been an ancient tradition. Again, what's the underlying point?

The underlying point of this story for the disciples and for us is that until the separation at the end of the age, the just will coexist with the wicked.

In the world, certainly, but equally likely, it can be applied to the church too. You see, Jesus' kingdom is not yet the conquering or consuming takeover anticipated by the Jews.

Instead, it has invaded the world in a surreptitious way and remains hidden except to those whose eyes have been opened.

Therefore, we who are members of God's kingdom are required to continue in his service in the midst of those who hate him and us, who disdain his truth and who would subvert his purposes.

[18 : 26] witnesses. Nevertheless, we have this great assurance. Judgment will happen when, you might ask, when the net is full.

At that time, when the full number of those who will be saved are brought into the fold, all of those spoken in John's gospel, where he mentions those that the father has given the son, then the angels will come and make separation of the wicked.

The wicked will be picked out from among the righteous, all who are not part of the kingdom, and these will be thrown into a fiery and terrible furnace.

No one escapes this judgment. moment. You see, Jesus does not mince his words on the fact of hell, not here, nor anywhere else in scripture.

Many times in the gospels, Jesus pronounces that the end of those who are not his sheep, not in the kingdom, will be in the fires of hell.

[19 : 47] And this parable is slightly different from that of the weeds in one particular way. This one only focuses on the destiny of the wicked.

I think that given that it follows directly after parables about the supreme worth of the kingdom, this parable serves as a very severe warning about the consequences, as Hebrews 2 verse 3 says, of neglecting so great a salvation.

The reality is this, everyone will one day come to see that the truly, the truly costly decision was that of declining the treasure, of declining to purchase the pearl.

The old bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp, had it right. Facing death at the stake, in spite of pleas from his friends, or the offers of clemency from his persecutors, he said this, you threaten me with fire that burns for an hour, and in a little while is put out, for you do not know about the fire of the judgment to come, and the fire of eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly.

Sober, sober words. At first glance as we come to the last parable, it doesn't quite look like one, but we will see it does have elements of that formula, the kingdom of heaven is like.

[21 : 43] However, before we get there, we read in verse 51, Jesus addressing his disciples, he says, have you understood all these things, Jesus asked?

Yes, they replied. when Jesus speaks in parables, he's often echoing Old Testament prophets who denounce the hard hearts of their hearers to what has already been revealed in the scriptures.

If you look back in verses 14 and 15 of this chapter, he goes so far as to say that his parabolic teaching is in fact the fulfillment of Isaiah 6 and that they are ever hearing and never understanding.

In contrast in verse 16 however, he declares that the disciples on the other hand have been blessed, it has been given to them, eyes that see and ears that hear.

So in light of this, Jesus' question in verse 51 is therefore very important to every one of his disciples, them and us, who must answer yes to this question.

[23 : 03] Do you understand the hidden things of the kingdom? Have your eyes been opened? And have your ears been unblocked?

Clearly, we can't know all things this side of heaven. But just like the disciples, who, if you look further in the gospels, continue to be rebuked again and again for their lack of faith and understanding, a yes to Jesus' question is a necessary indicator of the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing us to spiritual maturity.

You have to know that you are understanding more and more. if we are members of the kingdom, we should already and always be growing into a greater and greater understanding of Jesus and his work.

The disciples' positive answer was the correct one. And Jesus accepts their affirmation and moves on to this last parable about the nature of the kingdom.

in verse 52, 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.

[24 : 25] If you wondered about the title of the sermon, well, now you see it. What new truth is Jesus revealing to his disciples in this parable of the rich householder?

A householder who makes a display of his wealth, most commentators agree not for his own glory, but for the benefit of others. Well, for a start, he's letting them know that there's a new kind of interpreter of the scriptures now.

With this kingdom, there are new interpreters, and they're unlike the scribes that we've encountered so far, mostly in negative terms, I must say.

Andrew, in his PhD dissertation, actually discusses this new breed of teacher of the law, but he notes that while they stand in continuity with their predecessors, they are also crucially different, crucially different as Jesus says, treasures new and old.

The new kingdom scribe comes to the same scriptures as the Jewish scribes might have, but they come with a transformed understanding.

[25 : 51] You see, the kingdom has been inaugurated. It is a reality. Jesus has come. This implies that they can do far more than the Jewish scribes who only have the old to work with.

Kingdom teachers can bring out of these same words treasures new and old. The scriptures now have a clear point of focus.

Jesus Christ himself. He is the fulfillment of all of God's promises to his people. And so while the old should not be dismissed or negated, there is, however, a treasure trove of new insights because of Christ, that only the Christian teacher can discern and communicate.

There is also an implicit expectation that the disciples, these fishermen and tax collectors and ordinary men, have a teaching mandate.

They are being challenged to fulfill a new role, to follow in Jesus' footsteps, and to be the scribes of this new dispensation. And because of the previous parable of the net, they have an urgent imperative to the destiny of the lost should be too terrible for them and for us to contemplate.

[27 : 15] The only way to keep these out of that fiery end is to proclaim the truth, faithfully, persistently, believing that it is the power of salvation.

We too need to be convinced that this is not only a message for the first disciples, but that it is for all generations of the kingdom. The truth which Jesus revealed is a pearl of great price.

It must be preached and taught throughout the world, because it is the means, the only means, by which Jesus brings in all those who belong to the kingdom, until the net is full.

Paul summarizes it far better than I can, when he encapsulates all four parables in Philippians 3 verses 13 to 21. But one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

All of us, then, who are mature, should take such a view of things, and if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

[28 : 40] Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For as I have often told you before, and now tell you again, even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their destiny is destruction, their God is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.