

Broomfield



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## The Hidden Treasure and Pearl of Great Price

Christ taught with the use of parables. A major theme that He used was the kingdom of God. Many of the parables begin this way: “The kingdom of God” or “the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 13:24, “Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:”

Matthew 20:1, “For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.”

Matthew 25:1, “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.”

What is the kingdom of heaven? Is it a synonym for the church? Can one become a part of the kingdom of heaven and not be saved?

The answer to these questions is that the kingdom of heaven and its synonymous phrase, the kingdom of God, simply refer to the rule and reign of Christ. Thus when we read that the “kingdom of heaven is like” we learn something about the nature of the rule and reign of God — whether it be in heaven or on earth.

Now having stated this, it is helpful to note that God's kingdom — His rule and reign — has a past, present, and future element to it. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, mankind was plunged into the estate of sin and misery. In this estate, the entire world became subject to the rule and reign of Satan.<sup>1</sup> Now it would not be until the advent of Christ that the kingdom of God would physically re-enter this world.<sup>2</sup> And so, when we think of the kingdom of God with reference to the past, we think of God's rule and reign physically re-entering this world through Christ.

When we reference the kingdom of God in the present we reference the extension of God's rule and reign on this earth.<sup>3</sup> With the re-entry of the kingdom of God on the earth, souls are saved from the kingdom of darkness, people bow before God's Lordship, and we grow in our love for the Lord and our commitment to serve Him. Thus we see the kingdom of heaven increasing.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Ephesians 2:1-3 and Romans 8:18-25

<sup>2</sup> Compare John 3:3; Luke 17:20-21; Matthew 11:11, 12:28

<sup>3</sup> Compare Matthew 6:10; Luke 22:69, 24:26; Acts 2:35, 5:31; Ephesians 1:20-23; Philippians 2:9-11; and Colossians 1:13-14

Though the kingdom of God is growing and expanding in the present age, when we reference the kingdom of God in the future we know that it will not come into its fullness until the Second Coming of Christ.<sup>4</sup> It is at the Second Coming that God finally will destroy the kingdom of Satan, and will completely establish His kingdom on the earth — which is ultimately completed with the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Thus, when we open our Bible's and read a parable about the “kingdom of God” we understand that what is being referenced is something about the nature of God's rule and reign, either in the past, present or future.

The parable that we are currently studying will teach us something on the present manifestation of God's kingdom. In order to understand the message here, let me walk you through each parable phrase-by-phrase.

## **The Parable of the Hidden Treasure**

Matthew 13:44, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.”

As mentioned last time, Palestine had few banks (though throughout the Roman Empire banking was not that uncommon). As such, the practice of hiding valuables in the ground was common. Most people protected their valuables in a secret spot in the ground because their houses were not a very secure place in which to store one's savings.<sup>5</sup> And when they needed the money or decided to sell or trade a piece of jewelry, for instance, they would go to the place at night, uncover the jar or storage box, take out what was desired, and rebury the rest.

Furthermore, Palestine was the battleground of the Near East. Recall that the two main areas of civilization were the Nile River valley and the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. These areas were separated by what would become the home of Israel. Anytime one of these river-valley nations sought to expand their borders; eventually the people in the region of Israel would be overrun. As such, families would often bury food, clothing, and various household objects to protect them from plundering soldiers. Josephus wrote this:

“The gold and silver and the rest of that most precious furniture which the Jews had and which the owners treasured underground was done to withstand the fortunes of war.”

Thus, over the years, the ground of Palestine became a veritable treasure house. When the owner of buried treasure died or was forcefully driven from the land (i.e., like during the Assyrian or Babylonian exile) the treasure would be forever lost unless someone accidentally discovered it. Now in light of this, the setting of this parable would have fit quite nicely into the thinking of the day.

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<sup>4</sup> Compare Matthew 25:31-24, 46

<sup>5</sup> Compare Matthew 6:19

At first glance, this man sounds rather dishonest. In fact, many are bothered by the fact that Christ uses what appears to be a deceitful practice to illustrate the nature of the kingdom of God. Honest behavior would demand that this man tell the owner of the field about the treasure, since it was on his property and therefore rightfully belonged to him. Right?

Well, not necessarily! According to the culture of that day, what this man did would not have been considered dishonest at all. Rabbinical Law provided that, “If a man finds scattered fruit or money, it belongs to the finder.<sup>6</sup> And thus, if a person came across money or other valuables that were obviously lost and whose owner was dead or unknown, the finder had the right to keep what was found—even if it was found on someone else's property. In light of this, the honesty of the man is actually seen. He didn't have to buy the field! He could have just taken the treasure. Yet he doesn't. Rather, he sells all that he has and buys the field!

## The Pearl of Great Price

Matthew 13:45, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant<sup>7</sup> man, seeking goodly pearls.”

Once again, Christ uses a very common picture to illustrate the nature of the kingdom of God. In this story Christ talks about a merchant. This word merchant describes a wholesale dealer whose business was to buy and resell merchandise. Typically, the merchant traveled about the country, perhaps to many countries, looking for items to buy and then sell for a profit.

Now this particular merchant made his money dealing with pearls. Pearls were the most highly valued gems in the ancient world and often were bought as investments — much as diamonds are today. The Talmud spoke of pearls as being beyond price. Some Egyptians and Romans held the pearl in such awe that they worshiped it. It was reported that Lollia Paulina, the wife of Roman emperor Caligula, often wore a vast fortune in pearls in her hair and on her ears, neck, wrists, and fingers. Cleopatra is said to have owned two extremely valuable pearls — each of which would be worth several million dollars in today's market. In fact, as a sign of one's extravagance when a ruler wanted to flaunt his wealth he would sometimes dissolve a pearl in vinegar and drink it in his wine! All this points to the HIGH esteem that was placed on the pearl in Christ's day — making it, as noted above, the most highly valued gem in the ancient world.<sup>8</sup>

Why were pearls so costly and desirable?

Pearls were valued for a number of reasons. First, they are beautiful. Second, they were small and easily transportable — great amounts of wealth could be kept in a very small place. Third, they were very hard to get. Diving for pearls was extremely hazardous. In fact, many divers lost their lives or ruined their health in obtaining the oysters that contained the pearls. As such, pearls were extremely precious and

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<sup>6</sup> This is quoted in Dr. MacArthur's commentary on *Matthew 8-15*, page 382. Edersheim says as much in *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Book I, footnote #2, page 595. Derrett in his book, *Law*, pages 1-16 also says this. Regardless of the ethical merits of this man's actions, keep in mind the Rule of Parabolic Interpretation — every parable has two independent elements: a vehicle and a message. Thus, to use the actions of ungodly men to illustrate a Divine truth (specifically Luke 16:1-9) says nothing of the Divine truth. Why? Because the vehicle finds its importance ONLY as it presents the message! And that could be the case in this parable. The ethics of the players in Christ's parables generally is irrelevant.

<sup>7</sup> ἐμποροῦς *emporos*

<sup>8</sup> In light of this, 1 Timothy 2:9; Matthew 7:6; and Revelation 21:21 take on a whole new meaning.

often rare. Finally, there was little, if no, preparation required before selling the pearl. Therefore the pearl was highly valued and greatly desired in Christ's day.

Matthew 13:46, “Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

This presents a picture that epitomizes human nature. This particular merchant is a professional with a keen eye for pearls. This man stumbles upon the find of a lifetime. So he takes a huge risk, goes home and liquidates ALL of his worldly wealth. Then this man purchases what he knows is a great bargain.<sup>9</sup> In fact, this merchant is so sure of the value of this pearl he exhibits no hesitation. He knew that the return that he would make was worth the risk of losing all that he had!

## The Message

Thus we see the parables of the Hidden Treasure and Pearl of Great Price. Now, what is the message herein being conveyed?

The focus of this chapter is found in Matthew 13:1-9. The parable given here is about the various responses to the kingdom of God — The Four Soils. In Matthew 13:24-30 the emphasis is upon the present co-existence of the kingdom of God with Satan's kingdom — The Tares and the Wheat. In Matthew 13:31-33 the emphasis is upon the kingdom of God's power and influence in the world — The Mustard Seed.

Now in this context the natural question, which our parables answer, is this: So what?

So what that there are a variety of responses to the kingdom of God? So what that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan exist side-by-side? Who cares that the kingdom of God is unstoppable? What difference will any of this make in my life?

The answer to these questions is this: The kingdom of God is so valuable that it is worth losing everything we have in order to gain it.

## The Kingdom's Value

In Job 28:1-11, we read of the incredible amount of labor that goes into gaining wealth on this earth. And our day is no different. We forfeit our families, health, future, friends and our walk with God in order to have “wealth.” And what is it that we have at the end of our lives? NOTHING when it comes to the Kingdom of God! What is it then that we should seek? What is of lasting importance in this life?

Job 28:28, “And unto man he said, **Behold, the fear of the Lord**, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.”

Matthew 6:33, “But **seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness**; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Matthew 6:20, “But **lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust doth

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<sup>9</sup> Is this realistic? Indeed! It is no more unrealistic than people who go into debt to start a business.

corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:”

Truly there is nothing more valuable in heaven or earth, in life or death than the kingdom of heaven! Now why is that? Is it because the kingdom of heaven brings with it the promise for a good life? Is it because the kingdom of heaven is eternal and thus is good for eternal life? Is it because in seeking God’s kingdom that “all these things will be added unto you”?<sup>10</sup>

Now why is it that there is nothing more valuable than the kingdom of Heaven?

It is because the kingdom of Heaven brings with it these things:

1 Timothy 4:8, “For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having **promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.**”

The kingdom of Heaven is eternal and is valuable presently and for the future.

Certainly the kingdom of God is worth all these things, but that is NOT ultimately why the kingdom of God is so valuable! The value of the kingdom of God is NOT ultimately measured by what we receive, BUT by what God gave in order to establish it: His Son!

The 19th century Scottish preacher Thomas Guthrie wrote of the value of the kingdom:

“[Its value is estimated] in the blood of Christ to wash out sin's darkest stains, [and] in the grace of God to purify the foulest heart...”<sup>11</sup>

According to the eternal plan of God, mankind fell into the estate of sin and misery. Now God could have at this point vented His wrath against all mankind. God could have wiped us all out. He could have completely and utterly destroyed the earth and the entire universe. He could have started over, but He did not!

Rather, because justice demanded our death on account of our sin. God sent His sinless, innocent Son to live as man under the law. And then Christ died as a miserable sinner— though He Himself was without sin. And all of this to establish a kingdom of righteousness wherein we now and forevermore shall dwell! Thus we see the value of the kingdom of God. Our salvation was so important to God that the love relationship between the Father and Son was compromised— compromised for you and for me! From this perspective we understand the line in Isaac Watts' great hymn:

“When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.”<sup>12</sup>

What are cars, boats, houses, savings accounts, promotions, and the praise of men?

In light of the inestimable value of the kingdom of God, nothing more deserving than our contempt, disdain and scorn. Calvin wrote this:

“The natural meaning of the words is, that the Gospel does not receive from us the respect which

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<sup>10</sup> Compare Matthew 6:33

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Guthrie, *The Parables*, London: Alexander Strahan, 1866, page 213

<sup>12</sup> Isaac Watts, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, *Old Trinity Hymnal* #186, *New Trinity Hymnal* #252

it deserves, unless we prefer it to all the riches, pleasures, honours, and advantages of the world, and to such an extent, that we are satisfied with the spiritual blessings which it promises, and throw aside every thing that would keep us from enjoying them..."<sup>13</sup>

I love how Rutherford put it:

"O thrice fools are we, who, like new-born princes weeping in the cradle, know not that there is a kingdom before them!"<sup>14</sup>

And yet it gets even worse! For not only can we be found at times longing for the passing treasures of this world we even can be found living for them as well!

## Esau

It reminds me of Esau. God in His providence ordained the family to be a vessel where He worked His will for His people. God had promised that He would "establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Genesis 17:7).

Peter said of this promise that it "is for you and your children" (Acts 2:39).

In fact, as Adam and Eve did not have parents the exhortation to leave and cleave was directed to Adam. And we interpret Genesis 2:24, as an exhortation for the man to covenantally sever his relationship with his parents and establish another mini-kingdom of God. Accordingly, the responsibility to carry on a father's mini-kingdom resided with the first born male child.

As such, the Lord entrusted to the first born male two very important tools — tools which on account of their purpose made them treasured devices in the kingdom of God. The first of these tools was the birthright. This was a double-portion of the inheritance intended to give the future head of the father's household the physical means to care for the family. The second was the blessing. The blessing was the time when the father officially chose the next covenant head of his household.

With this backdrop, consider the folly of Esau. By grace he had the kingdom of God. He was the first-born. To him belonged the coveted position of caring for his father's household. This was coveted because it had so many kingdom ramifications. He understandably was in the line of grace through which it would have been expected that God would have worked. And yet, he gave all of this up for a pot of stew!

Genesis 25:27-34, "And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.

And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he

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<sup>13</sup> John Calvin, Calvin's Commentaries, Volume XVI, page 132

<sup>14</sup> Letters of Samuel Rutherford, Letter XX, [Banner of Truth Trust, 1891 edition, © 1984], page 71

sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.”

Do you understand what is going on here?

Esau willingly forfeited his soul for a bowl of soup!

You say, "You're reading way too much into this!"

Hebrews 12:15-16, “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.”

For what trifle in this world are you willing to sell your soul?

Is it convenience, pleasure, success, popularity, security, or companionship?

Oh how sad it is to go whoring after the things this world has to give when we — this moment — have the riches of eternity in Christ!

Let us therefore rebel against the world system that prizes health, prestige, security, reputation, and wealth over knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. Let us pour contempt on all forms of pride. Let us be satisfied with nothing more and nothing less than Christ — our Pearl of Great Price!

Listen! The kingdom is before us, let us therefore stop crying and craving. And let us rejoice!

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on April 10, 2005. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.