

Introduction

1. Have you ever found something valuable just lying on the street or somewhere unexpected?
 - a. When I was a boy, I once found a \$20 bill lying in the street outside the bank where I had an account. That was back when \$20 was a more significant amount of money!
 - b. I went in to make my deposit and turned in the \$20 bill.
 - c. The teller took it and said if anyone claimed it, she would return it to them. Otherwise, I could have it.
 - d. No one ever claimed it, and eventually the \$20 was deposited into my account.
 - e. In the two main parables examined in this session, Jesus spoke of something of great value that once found was worth giving everything to obtain.
2. We are examining the **unique kingdom parables** found in Matthew 13.
 - a. Parable of Soils (Mt 13:1-23; Mk 4:1-25; Lk 8:4-18)
 - b. **Parable of Weeds** (Mt 13:24-30); Parable of Weeds Explained (Mt 13:36-43)
 - c. Parable of Mustard Tree (Mt 13:31-32; Mk 4:30-32)
 - d. **Parable of Leavened Loaf** (Mt 13:33-35; Mk 4:33-34)
 - e. **Parable of Hidden Treasure** (Mt 13:44)
 - f. **The Parable of the Pearl** (Mt 13:45-46)
 - g. **Parable of the Net** (Mt 13:47-50)
 - h. **Parable of the House Owner** (Mt 13:51-53)

A. The Parable of the Mustard Tree (31-32; cf., Mk 4:30-32)

1. “He told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Through it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in it branches.’” (Mt 13:31-32)
2. Jesus did not explain the meaning of this parable.
 - a. What do you believe it means?
 - b. Daniel Akin presents the possibilities. “Some have suggested that ‘the birds of the air’ represent Satan, connecting these birds back to the ones in [the Parable of the Soils]....Others believe this reference indicates shelter for kingdom citizens. Still others suggest the birds represent the nations coming into the kingdom. Finally, some believe the birds are simply part of the story and have no special significance. (Daniel Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 95).
 - c. Warren Wiersbe prefers the first view and writes, “The birds in the parable of the sower represented Satan (Matt. 13:19). Passages like Daniel 4:12 and Ezekiel 17:23 indicate that a tree as a symbol of a world power. These facts suggest that the parable teaches an abnormal growth of the kingdom of heaven, one that makes it possible for Satan to work in it. Certainly ‘Christendom’ has become a worldwide power with a complex organization of many branches. What started in a humble manner today boasts of material possessions and political influences” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Loyal*, 110).
 - d. Either a positive or negative view of the birds in this parable yields meaningful insight into the parable, but the negative view is preferred for consistency with images from Jesus’ earlier Parable of the Soils. We must never over-analyze or over-allegorize Jesus’ parables.
 - e. Certainly, all the above views share the same central insight related to the rapid, large growth of the kingdom of heaven from a small beginning.

B. Parable of the Leavened Loaf (33-34; cf., allusion in Mk 4:33-34)

1. Mark and Matthew agree that Jesus taught using parables which often were cryptic to His hearers.
 - a. Mark writes, “With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.” (Mk 4:33-34)
 - b. Matthew parallels Mark and adds a reference to an Old Testament fulfillment when he writes, “Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parable; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: ‘I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.’” (Mt 13:34-35)
2. Before these parallel statements, Matthew included the Parable of the Leavened Loaf: “‘The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.’” (Mt 13:33)
3. Again, Jesus did not explain this parable’s meaning. What do you think it means?
4. Again, this Parable of the Leavened Loaf has been interpreted in different ways.
 - a. Wiersbe writes, “The mustard seed illustrates the false *outward* expansion of the kingdom, while the leaven illustrates the *inward* development of false doctrine and false living. Throughout the Bible, leaven is a symbol of evil.... Jesus used leaven to picture hypocrisy (Luke 12:10, false teaching (Matt. 16:6-12), and worldly compromise ((Matt. 22:16-21)....Satan has worked hard to introduce false doctrine and false living into the ministry of the Word of God...The kingdom of heaven began with the sowing of the Word of God in the hearts of men. Much of the seed did not bear fruit, but some was fruitful. Satan opposed the work of God by sowing counterfeit Christians, by encouraging a false growth, and by introducing false doctrine. It would seem that Satan is winning! But the test is at *the end* of the age, not *during* the age” (Wiersbe, *Be Loyal*, 111).
 - b. Craig Blomberg summarizes the other more popular interpretative view when he writes, “The current manifestation of God’s reign within Jesus’ small band of disciples seems relatively impotent; one day many will be astonished about how their movement grew and impacted the world....It is sometimes argued that yeast, often a metaphor in Jewish literature for the spreading influence of evil and used in this way by Jesus in 16:6, must also here refer to the growing opposition against him. But immediate context must always take precedence over background. Yeast can be a positive symbol (e.g., Lev 7:13-14; 23:17) and, with all the parables dealing with the growth of plants and seeds in this chapter having the positive referent of the growth of the kingdom, the parable of the yeast must almost certainly be taken this way too” (Craig Blomberg, *Mark* in NAC, 220).
 - c. It seems that either a positive or negative view of the meaning of the leaven can be related in a meaningful way to the kingdom of heaven, but again for consistency within the overall context of this set of parables, the negative view of the leaven espoused by Wiersbe seems best.
5. G. Campbell Morgan well concludes on the consistent theme running through these first four parables in Matthew 13 when he writes, “...throughout the age there is present and at work the principle of evil. Three-fourths of the good seed fails of harvest, and the enemy deliberately intermixes with the wheat the darnel. There is a false development even of good into ostentatious display which is out of harmony with the true spirit of the Kingdom. The meal offering of fellowship in service is corrupted by the intrusion of the leaven of impurity” (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 162).

C. The Parable of the Treasure (44)

1. The Parable of the Treasure is unique to Matthew. **Read Mt 13:44.**
2. The Setting and Audience have changed from the first four kingdom parables in Matthew 13.
 - a. Matthew recorded, “Then [Jesus] left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, ‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.’” (Mt 13:36).
 - b. Jesus shared the first four kingdom parables (i.e., Soils, Weeds, Mustard Tree, and Leavened Loaf) with the crowd. The last four (i.e., Treasure, Pearl, Net, and House Owner) he shared more privately with just His disciples inside the house, which was perhaps Peter’s home in Capernaum.

c. Merrill Tenney writes, “Jesus declared that the parables were intended both to reveal and to conceal truth, for when the disciples asked him why he used parables in speaking to the crowds, he said: *Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.* (Matt. 13:11) Jesus intended that his instructions should be plain to those who were ready for it, and obscure to those who were rebellious....The last four parables deal with inner aspects of the kingdom: the cost of building it, the double destiny of those affected by it, and the intermingling of new and old elements in its teaching” (Tenney, *New Testament Survey*, 154-55).

3. The Context has likewise changed as Jesus revealed inside information to His circle of disciples about the nature of the kingdom of heaven/God.

4. “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure (Gk., *thesauro*) hidden (Gk., *kekrummeno*) in a field (Gk., *argo*). When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.” (44)

a. Jesus used the word “like” (Gk., *homoia*) as His usual way of introducing a parable. This word lies at the beginning of our word homogenized, which means that the product is alike or the same.

b. Again, the focus of the parable is “the kingdom of heaven” (Gk., *basileia ton ourpanon*).

c. Finding an unexpected treasure of great value would not have been a common experience but certainly an exciting possibility for His disciples.

d. The man in this parable found a treasure in a field as he was walking by and leaves it hidden.

1) Who is the man?

2) What is the treasure?

3) Why did the man hide the treasure after he found it?

e. What do you think this parable means?

1) The common interpretation of this parable is that once a person finds Christ, he or she must be willing to give up everything (i.e., sin, possessions, life itself) and follow Christ wholeheartedly.

2) Craig Blomberg holds this common view and writes, “Jesus likens one who enters the kingdom to a man who sells everything he owns in order to buy a field containing a treasure that will more than compensate for his sacrifice. One should not worry about the man’s ethics in hiding the treasure. We need neither justify his behavior nor imitate it. This is simply part of the story line that helps to make sense of the plot. Jesus frequently tells parables in which unscrupulous character nevertheless display some virtue from which Christians can learn (cf. esp. Luke 16:1-8; 18:1-8). Similarly, one must not interpret the buying of the treasure as an allegory for the atonement, as if Jesus were the treasure hunter purchasing our redemption.... Sometimes God calls would-be disciples literally to sell all (19:21), but they must always abandon anything that would stand in the way of wholehearted allegiance to Christ and the priorities of the kingdom” (Blomberg, 223-24).

3) Warren Wiersbe holds a different view and discusses the problems with the common view when he writes, “To begin with, Jesus Christ is not a hidden treasure. He is perhaps the best-known Person of history. In the second place, the sinner cannot ‘find Christ’ for he is blind and stubborn (Rom. 3:10ff.). It is the Savior who finds the lost sinner (Luke 19:10). And no sinner could ever purchase salvation!...Once again, Old Testament symbolism assists us in our interpretation. The treasure is the nation of Israel (Ex. 19:5; Ps. 135:4). That nation was placed in the world to bring glory to God, but it failed. It became a nation hidden, a treasure not being invested to produce dividends for God. Jesus Christ gave His all to purchase the whole world in order to save the nations (John 11:51)....There is, then, a future for Israel.....God sees Israel as His treasure, and one day He will establish her in her glorious kingdom” (Wiersbe, *Be Loyal*, 112).

f. I tend to agree in general with Wiersbe’s view but without the dispensationalism. For me, Jesus is the man who discovers a great treasure which is human beings who want to be part of the kingdom of God. For a time, He allows this treasure to be hidden, but then He comes and gives all of Himself on the cross to redeem not only His treasured people but also the whole world (i.e., the field) even though many humans will still reject Him.

D. The Parable of the Pearl (45-46)

1. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls (Gk., *margaritas*). When he found one of great value (Gk., *polutimon margariten*), he went away and sold everything (Gk., *panta*) he had and bought it.” (45-46)
2. The setting, audience, and context are the same as Jesus continues his parabolic use of treasure.
3. While the Parable of the Pearl appears to be an elaboration and reinforcement of the Parable of the Treasure, there is more to be found within it. Otherwise, Jesus would not have shared it.
4. What do you think this parable means?
 - a. Blomberg consistently supports the common interpretative view of this parable when he writes, “Interestingly, in the parable of the pearl the man is searching for wealth, whereas in the parable of the hidden treasure the man stumbles across it. As with the parables of mustard seed and leaven, Jesus is reaching out to every person in his audience. He calls the spiritual seeker as well as the apathetic atheist” (Blomberg, 224).
 - b. Wiersbe presents an alternative interpretation, “The pearl represents the church....Unlike most other gems, the pearl is a unity—it cannot be carved like a diamond or emerald. The church is a unity (Eph. 4:4-6), even though the professing church on earth is divided. Like a pearl, the church is the product of suffering. Christ died for the church (Eph. 5:25) and His suffering on the cross made possible her birth. A pearl grows gradually, and the church grows gradually as the Spirit convicts and converts sinners. No one can see the making of the pearl, for it is hidden in the shell of the oyster under the waters. No one can see the growth of His church in the world....So, in spite of Satan’s subtle working in this world, Christ is forming His church. He sold all that He had to purchase His church, and nothing Satan can do will cause Him to fail” (Wiersbe, *Be Loyal*, 112-13).
 - c. Morgan writes, “This Church of the living God, the chosen and elect company who will become in their union with Christ the medium of manifestation, is the pearl the Merchant saw; and to give which to God He poured out all that He had. Our hearts may rest assured that in all the apparent failure of the Kingdom ideal in the age—not actual failure, for everything moves toward God’s ultimate—the chief value, the chief glory, and the chief business, from Heaven’s standpoint, is the gathering out of the Church, and its preparation for a high and holy vocation in the ages yet to come, for that Church is the redeemed Kingdom of God” (Morgan, 172).
 - d. I agree with Wiersbe and Morgan, but we must be careful about adding too much interpretative detail to the simple truth that Jesus presented in both of these last two parables: We, His people/church, are of highest value to Jesus, and He has given all of Himself to redeem us and to offer redemption to the whole world as we proclaim His good news.

E. Reflections

1. Isn’t it amazing that such simple stories can contain such powerful insights.
2. Jesus’ parables are often cryptic, and interpreters may often seek meaning beyond the simple truth that Jesus intended to share.
3. From the Parable of the Mustard Tree we must learn that growth is not necessarily good kingdom growth if it is done for the wrong reasons and with the wrong motivations.
4. From the Parable of the Leavened Loaf we must learn that evil is mixed in with the good of what we do in God’s kingdom. We must be part of the church but be aware of and separate ourselves from corrupting influences within it.
5. From the Parable of the Treasure and the Parable of the Pearl we learn of our great value to God and His great sacrifice for us that we may be members of His kingdom.
6. So, let us wholeheartedly follow God our King every day in all that we say and do.