

THE GREATEST TREASURE IS JESUS

Matthew 13:24-58

Key Verse: 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.”

In this passage Jesus tells six parables. They are the parable of the weeds (24-30; 36-43), the parable of the mustard seed (31-32), the parable of the yeast (33), the parable of the hidden treasure (44), the parable of the pearl (45-46), and the parable of the net (47-50). Their subject matter is quite varied. However, they have a common theme. Each one begins, “The kingdom of heaven is like....” They help us to see the kingdom of heaven. They give insight into its hidden reality. When we study them prayerfully, we find a progression. They reach a climax as those who discover the treasure of the kingdom realize its worth and claim it for themselves. These parables are not as direct as Jesus words, “You must be born again to see the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:3). However, they offer us a more comprehensive understanding. As we study them, may God help us to discover the greatest treasure, Jesus Christ.

First, the parable of the weeds and its explanation (24-30; 36-43).

Look at verses 24-26. “Jesus told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.’” According to some scholars, the weeds refer to a toxic plant called darnell. As it grows, darnell looks identical to wheat. Only when it sprouts and the inner head appears can it be distinguished from wheat. Look at verses 27-28a. “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ ‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.” Look at verses 28b-30. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’” The servants volunteered to pull up all the weeds, working overtime at no charge. But the owner stopped them. It was to protect the wheat. He would deal with the weeds at harvest time.

After telling several parables, Jesus left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.” The disciples’ simple act reveals their growing wisdom. They knew they had to understand the parable. They did not want to merely guess as to its meaning. So they asked Jesus to explain it. Like them, when we don’t understand, we must ask Jesus in prayer.

Jesus gave a precise explanation. Look at verses 37-39. “He answered, ‘The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age and the harvesters are angels.’” Here, the good seed does not refer to the word of God, as it did in the parable of the sower. The good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. Sons of the kingdom are those who accept the word of Jesus, grow in the image of Christ, and bear fruit in this world. They love their enemies and do good to those who hate them (Mt 5:45). Jesus worked hard to raise sons of the kingdom and plant them in the world. This is how Jesus advances his kingdom and reveals the glory of God.

For example, Jesus called Dr. Samuel Yoo when he was a teenager and planted in his heart the grace of forgiveness of sins and the desire to reveal God’s glory in the world. Later, Jesus planted Dr. Yoo in Uganda as a medical missionary. One time, Dr. Yoo accidentally pricked himself with a needle that had been used on an HIV patient. There was a real possibility for Dr. Yoo to contract AIDS. As he awaited the results of the blood test, he felt the agony of those who have AIDS. He began to have God’s compassion for them. One night, Dr. Yoo’s daughter became very ill. There was no proper medical facility available for her treatment. As he cried out to God, Dr. Yoo realized that many Ugandan parents suffered as he did. He felt God’s compassion for them. Compassion gave birth to a vision to open a medical clinic, and next a hospital. He wanted to heal all the sick in Uganda and reveal the love of Christ to them. Now many have been healed. Moreover, many students have accepted the gospel through him. Four house churches have been established at Makerere University. About 250 students are studying the Bible in

small groups at Kyambogo University. In this way, the sons of the kingdom reveal God's love to the world. Jesus works hard to plant them.

However, Jesus' enemy the devil is also planting seeds in the world. They are the weeds, the sons of the devil. They are not sons of the devil because of some weird kind of birth defect, but because they listened to the devil's lies. In John 8:44, Jesus said to the Pharisees, "You belong to your father the devil...he is a liar and the father of lies." They denied the divinity of Christ and did not accept his teaching. They listened to the devil's lies and did whatever they wanted to do. One becomes a child of the devil by accepting the devil's lie into his heart. Dan Brown may think of himself as a successful author for penning "The Da Vinci Code." He has been praised in many literary reviews, and he made a lot of money. But the content of his book is the devil's lies. He is nothing more than a weed on the face of the earth.

For a time, the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one coexist on the earth. However, God's righteous judgment will come. Look at verses 40-43. "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear." We learn several things through this parable.

In the first place, we need spiritual insight based on the Bible. In this world there is both good and evil, the work of Christ and the work of the devil. We must be discerning in our judgments and decisions. But the trend of the world strongly urges relativism. Relativistic people accept everything without making a value judgment, saying, "whatever." Relativistic people lose the meaning of life, the motivation to work hard, and discernment between right and wrong. They easily degenerate into hedonists, like Hugh Hefner, the founder of Playboy magazine. Recently, he turned 80 years old. It is almost time for him to die and go to hell. But he said, "80 is the new 40," suggesting that he will live long and sin continually. He speaks the devil's words, "You will not surely die." He is a liar and a weed planted by the devil. We must hold to the absolutes of God in the Bible, so that we may see good and evil clearly.

In the second place, we need the patience of God. When we see the evil of the world as it is, we may want God to destroy it right away. Sometimes we wonder why God allows the wicked to exist on the earth. However, as we learn in the parable, to remove the wicked may result in damaging a son of the kingdom. So God waits. For example, the famous atheist Mrs. O'Hare caused so much trouble in America. She initiated the court case that led to the removal of prayer from public schools. Sometimes we wonder why God did not destroy her. But her son, William, became a devout Christian. He has worked to eradicate the evil done by his mother. No one imagined that he could be a son of the kingdom. God spares the wicked for the sake of the sons of the kingdom. We must thank God for his patience with the world and us (Ro 2:4; 2 Pe 3:9). We must learn the patience of God. We must learn to love those who do evil and pray for them.

In the third place, we need the promise of God. When we study this parable carefully, there is a transition from the world to the kingdom. Jesus began by saying, "The field is the world...." Later, he says, "...they will weed out of his kingdom...." The kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of heaven. Revelation 11:15b says, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." When that happens, the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. We need this promise of glory in our hearts. Then we can overcome the world. We will face opposition and misunderstanding. In this world, honest and compassionate Bible teachers are called narrow-minded bigots by relativists. Those who live a pure life are regarded as weird by corrupted people. But the day will come when the angels of God will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Second, the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast (31-33).

Look at verses 31-33. "He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.'" Jesus clearly tells us that the kingdom of heaven is growing in this world. Its beginning may seem small and its growth may not look spectacular. But it has an indestructible life. It grows without ceasing until it covers the world. The kingdom of heaven is

growing. But we must know how to recognize its growth. Twenty years ago, several intern shepherds transplanted a small tree from Dr. Lee's house to the staff residence. We knew how much Dr. Lee loved that tree. So we really wanted it to be healthy and to grow. We looked at it every day, to see if it was growing. Well, we could not see much happening. We were just grateful that it did not die. Yet in the course of time, this tree has grown tremendously. Now it reaches way up into the sky and many birds perch in its branches. The kingdom of heaven is growing. The kingdom of heaven grows without fail until it fills the world. When we believe Jesus' parable, we can see it.

Through this parable, we also learn to value the small beginnings of the kingdom. For example, Jesus himself was born as a baby in a manger. He looked too small and weak in the background of the Roman Empire. But the life of Jesus grew to encompass the whole earth. Likewise, a one-to-one Bible study may seem small in the complex and fast-moving culture of our times. But when the life of God is working through his word, that one-to-one Bible study can grow into a spiritual blessing to the whole world. Let's value one-to-one Bible study highly.

Look at verse 33. "He told them still another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.'" This parable explains the power of influence of the kingdom. The sons of the kingdom may not be many in number, but their influence changes the whole world. When Dr. Samuel Lee and Mother Barry began to teach a giving spirit to poor Koreans who were suffering after the war, it looked like a small thing. But it became part of a national movement that turned Korea into a great missionary-sending country. Now the spirit of self-supporting lay missionaries has spread around the world.

Third, the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl (44-46).

Look at verse 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." A young man happened to be passing through a field. It was a nice spring day with golden sunshine, fresh meadows, and singing birds. But he was not completely happy thinking about his school loans and credit card debts. He worried that his future might be in the hands of capitalists. Then something on the ground caught his eye and stirred his curiosity. He began to dig. In a short time, he had uncovered the most magnificent treasure he could ever imagine: sparkling diamonds, pure gold, emeralds, rubies, and sapphires. The young man realized that if he could just obtain that treasure, all of his problems would be solved. So he covered it up and went away and began to raise the money. The only thing on his mind, night and day, was how to obtain the treasure. He sold his old junk car, his laptop computer, his vintage collection of baseball cards, and his Brad Pitt wannabe wardrobe. His friends thought he was out of his mind. But he looked happy all the time. At last, he bought the field. It cost all he had, yet the treasure was more than worth it. With that one bold transaction his life completely changed. He was no more a mundane, petty man, but a man of security and endless opportunity.

Jesus is the greatest treasure. Jesus solves all of our life problems. Jesus gives us everlasting wealth. It is because Jesus gives the righteousness of God. In order to do so, Jesus shed his holy blood on the cross and died for us. Isaiah 53:5 says, "...he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." Jesus saves us from all the consequences of sin and makes us holy children of God. In 1 Corinthians 1:30, Paul says, "...Christ Jesus...has become for us wisdom from God—that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption." In Jesus we have access to all the riches of heaven, for we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. Jesus gives us eternal life, which is most valuable to anyone. When we have Jesus, we have everything. No matter what we may lose to gain Christ, it is worth it. In Philippians 3:8-9, Paul said, "...I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." (Php 3:8-9)

Missionary Joseph Ahn used to be a diplomat of the Korean government. He could travel the world, meet powerful leaders, and enjoy all kinds of delicious food and so on. He was the envy of many. But this kind of life did not make him happy. One day he resigned from his diplomats position and came to Chicago to be a Bible teacher for young people. He worked various jobs, including being a teacher in the Chicago Public Schools. There, he was surrounded by undisciplined children who gave him a hard time constantly. But he was most happy. It was because he gained Christ. He learned the humbleness of Christ. He learned the shepherd heart of Christ. He learned the wisdom of

Christ. So he never looks grumpy, but always joyful and peaceful. He is sure that he made the best bargain. Now many Northeastern students hang around him to find peace and joy.

Missionary Joseph's joyful life of faith influenced his children. His son, Dr. Joseph Ahn Jr., is an excellent doctor. He earns enough money and could live in luxury. But he sacrifices willingly and joyfully for the kingdom of heaven, supporting his father to serve God full time. Missionary Joseph's daughter is an excellent student. After finishing medical school with top scores, she could have gone anywhere to continue her career. In fact, she was accepted into a most prestigious program at Harvard University. Any other young doctor would have taken that opportunity without a second thought. But Maria decided to give it up in order to stay in Chicago. She accepted a lesser position at another university. Her primary concern was not her career, but her husband's spiritual growth. Now Shepherd Ben is growing daily. Those who truly possess the kingdom of heaven are willing to sacrifice anything, knowing that they have gained the best treasure, Jesus Christ.

Fourth, the parable of the net and rejection in his hometown (47-58).

In verses 47-50, Jesus told the parable of the net. The point of this parable is the coming judgment of God. Jesus repeats a truth taught in the parable of the weeds. There will come a day when the angels of heaven will separate the wicked from the righteous. The righteous will inherit eternal life in the kingdom. The wicked will be thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. At that time those who valued most the things of the world will be sorry. On the other hand, those who valued the kingdom of heaven rejoice forever. Jesus repeated this truth with a broken heart. Though men do not like the final judgment, it will happen.

Look at verse 51. "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. 'Yes,' they replied." The disciples thought that they had understood everything. It was because they had a treasure in their hearts. They felt they were truly rich men in the sight of God.

Look at verses 53-58. Jesus went to his hometown. The Son of God wanted to bless them. But they only remembered Jesus' human background and rejected him. Due to lack of faith, they could not receive the treasure of heaven.

Through the parables of this passage we have learned much about the kingdom of heaven. Most of all, we have learned that Jesus is the greatest treasure. When we have Jesus, we have everything.