

A Hidden Treasure

Matthew 13:24-52

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.”

Jesus called his generation ‘wicked’ and ‘adulterous.’ The response of the people was worse than the Ninevites of Jonah’s time and the Queen of the South in Solomon’s time. Yet Jesus did not despair and give up. Jesus kept sowing the seed of God’s word, hoping, praying, believing, indeed knowing it would produce a crop in and through his committed disciples. Jesus had hope and faith that his disciples would grow and overcome the hostile forces in the world. They would prevail and share in God’s glory and victory as children of the kingdom. Jesus declared the triumph and reign of God in spite of much opposition from political and religious authorities. Jesus had absolute confidence in the plan and purpose of God.

In this passage, Jesus continues to tell six more parables to describe what “the kingdom of heaven is like.” Viewing these six parables as 3 pairs, we can find 3 characteristics of the kingdom of heaven followed by an illustration about treasure-full Bible study. Especially, may our souls eagerly hunt for heavenly hidden treasure.

First, the kingdom of heaven distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked (24-30; 36-43; 47-50). The two parables of the Weeds and the Net are essentially the same. Let’s consider the parable of the weeds and its meaning and then the parable of the net.

Look at the Parable of the Weeds in verses 24-30. **“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.’ ‘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. 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 uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect**

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the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

We don't need to guess the interpretation of this parable because Jesus gave us the interpretation when his disciples asked him privately to explain it to them. Fortunately, Matthew wrote it down for us in verses 37-43. Jesus said, **“The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people [sons] of the kingdom. The weeds are the people [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. 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 blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.”**

So what can we learn from the parable? For starters, Jesus sows good seed. The good seed stands for God's children, like Jesus' disciples (except for Judas Iscariot the betrayer). In this world, there are two kinds of people: children of the kingdom, and children of the devil. Judgment Day is coming when angels will remove for judgment everything that causes sin and all who do evil. But the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom. The world has both good and evil in it, and people who will be judged and people who will be saved. It is not our job to go around passing judgment or trying to eliminate wicked people. Of course, we must fight the good fight against evil in the world and in our own hearts. But only God knows and sees all, including the motives of people's hearts, and only God's judgments are perfectly true and right. This means that all sin and evil-doing must be confessed and renounced before God's judgment comes. It is not easy to live an upright and godly life while living in an evil, ungodly world. We should not be hasty to judge others, but pray for them to turn to God and be saved. 2 Peter 3:9 says, **“God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance.”**

The parable of the net is very similar to the parable of the weeds. Look at verses 47-50. **“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 baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end**

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of the age. The angels will and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Again, this parable describes a distinction between the righteous and the wicked at the time of God’s judgment. There are many kinds of people, but essentially there are only two kinds of people: the good and the bad, the righteous and the wicked. Very few people regard themselves as bad or wicked, since they know they are not as bad as they could be. They are not completely 100% evil. But God does not grade with a curve. God’s standard is absolute and perfect. God says that everything that causes sin and all who do evil will be removed from his kingdom.

There is no sin in the kingdom. God does not compromise with sin. All sin must be purged. Who can stand before the holy God? Paul declares in Romans 3:10, **“There is no one righteous, not even one.”** God’s judgment is sure and final. It is not a mere possibility. Unbelievers or scoffers cannot laugh it away. The angels of God will separate the wicked from the righteous. No one can escape the net of God’s judgment. 2 Corinthians 5:10 declares, **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...”** Some people complain: “How can a God of love condemn people to hell?” They like to believe in heaven and God’s love but not the teaching of hell and God’s judgment. Unfortunately, we cannot pick and choose what Bible verses we like and throw away the rest. God’s warnings of judgment are just as true as God’s promises of salvation. Hebrews 9:27-28 says, **“Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”**

Look again at the conclusion of Jesus’ interpretation of the parable in verse 43. **“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”** This parable is very similar to the prophecy in Daniel 12:2-3, **“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”**

Second, the kingdom of heaven starts small but has growing, transforming power (31-33). Consider the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast, one after the other: **“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 seeds, yet when it**

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grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

A mustard seed is very small compared to the large plant it grows to be. In other words, a mustard seed has great growing power. Consider an acorn. By looking at an acorn, no one could imagine that it could grow into a large oak tree. This parable is like Daniel’s vision of a rock that smashed a splendid statue and grew to be a huge mountain that filled the whole earth. Daniel 2:44 says, **“In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.”** Likewise, the seed of the gospel of God started small, with a baby in a Bethlehem stable, a carpenter’s son who became a traveling preacher. God’s kingdom starts small, where the word of God is planted in someone’s mind and heart, perhaps through a Bible study or a sermon or a prayer meeting.

On a Saturday in August, 1806, five Williams College students gathered in a field to discuss the spiritual needs of Asian countries. When a thunderstorm arose, they took shelter in a haystack and continued to pray. One of these “Haystack Prayer Meeting” students helped to found the American Bible Society and the United Foreign Missionary Society. In addition, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) was formed, giving many students opportunity to spread Christianity to other nations. What started as a 5-person prayer meeting produced 1250 missionaries within 50 years.

Look at verse 33. He told them still another parable: **“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.”** This parable involves a woman baking, a common sight. The kingdom of heaven spreads through men and women. Yeast used in baking is nearly unseen. Yet when a woman mixes yeast into a lot of flour, it can change or transform the whole batch of dough, causing it to rise. The amount of flour indicated here could feed 100 people from the bread that would be made. Yeast represents the transforming influence of the gospel to change a person, a community, even a nation from within. 2 Corinthians 5:17 expresses well the changing power of the gospel: **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”**

Charlotte “Lottie” Moon was born in Virginia in 1840 as the fourth of seven siblings. When Lottie was 13 years old, her father died in a riverboat accident. She was a spirited and outspoken girl who was indifferent to her Christian upbringing.

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At age 18 she underwent a spiritual awakening during revival meetings on a college campus. Like yeast, the gospel transformed her from the inside. At age 33 she followed her sister to China as a missionary. She served there 40 years to her death at age 72. Identifying with the poor, starving people of China, she died of malnourishment, weighing only 50 pounds. The Lottie Moon Fund, established in 1888 by the Southern Baptist Convention, has raised more than \$1 billion in the past 120 years. Lottie Moon's dedication to Christ grew to be a powerful influence upon Christian missions.

Third, the kingdom of heaven is more valuable than all we have (44-46). Jesus told two more parables in this passage in verses 44-46. **“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. 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.”**

These short parables express the value of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is like a hidden treasure. When a man found it, he sold everything he had to keep and cherish this treasure. This treasure was more valuable to him than anything in the world. This was also the testimony of St. Paul after finding Christ. He had been a man proud of his own achievements and credentials, which he could have boasted about. Yet he wrote in Philippians 3:7-8, **“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ...”**

To find the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant finding a prize pearl. He sells all he has to buy it because he knows its worth, that it is worth more than everything he has. Moses had a right value system that treasured God's reward rather than worldly treasures. Hebrews 11:26 says of Moses, **“He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.”**

Now let's look back at verses 34-35 in the chapter. **“Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; 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.’”** Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, knowing that many of them would not understand, like the soil on the path, rocks and thorns, like the weeds, like the

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bad fish. But others would delight in his word and seek out the meaning as his disciples did. They were like the good soil, the good seed, the good fish. They treasured his word, which was the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

At the end of these parables, Jesus asked them, **“Have you understood all these things?” “Yes,” they replied.** It could be debatable whether they really understood Jesus. But Jesus did not reject their claim. He said to them in verse 52, **“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.”**

Jesus’ disciples were familiar with the Old Testament, the ancient ways and teachings of God’s chosen people. There were many old treasures to hold on to in their knowledge of the history of God’s people. Still, Jesus was giving them new treasures. Jesus’ teaching was full of inspiration and new life from God. Jesus gave them new treasures to put with the old treasures. Effective, life-giving Bible study is not old, dry or habitual. Life-changing teaching is new, rich and heart-moving, like bringing out new treasures as well as old ones.

So, in review, what have we learned about the kingdom of heaven? First, the kingdom of heaven declares that all people will be either saved or judged by God. This is true whether we like or accept it or not. Denying or ignoring God’s judgment will not make it disappear. At the same time, it is not for us to pass judgment, but to leave judgment to God. It is our task to honor and fear God, before whom we must all stand. It is our challenge to persevere in hope and faith in Jesus amidst evil and unbelief in the world.

Second, the kingdom of heaven has growing power and transforming influence. We pray, “May God make North America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” How can this happen? The growing power of the gospel takes effect where the seed of God’s word is firmly planted. The changing power of God is transmitted where the gospel is believed. Romans 1:16 says, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.”**

Again, we learned that the kingdom of heaven is more valuable than hidden treasure or a big pearl. Francis of Assisi turned down his father’s merchant wealth in order to serve Christ purely and simply. Dwight Moody gave up his dream to be a millionaire shoe salesman in order to lead souls to Christ as an evangelist. M.

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Maria Jin of Vietnam recently graduated to glory. Her husband M.Joshua said of her: “She fully devoted her life for Vietnam mission work as a missionary like a kernel of wheat for about 20 years...She always would like to use any money for serving others not for herself. She would not even use money to buy any clothes for herself though her clothes were worn out.” Clearly, M. Maria Jin’s treasure was not her wardrobe or her earthly life, but the kingdom of heaven.

This passage helped me to review my life and re-examine my heart. What is my treasure? When I entered college, I had a worldly dream to get a high-paying job, get married and live happily in the suburbs, like my own upbringing, except with more money. At the same time, I had a nagging meaninglessness of life. Then the seed of God’s word was sown into my mind and heart. The truth of Jesus’ resurrection gave me new birth into a living hope. My worldly dream faded away in view of the meaning and joy that I found in Jesus. I dedicated my life to Christ, with no intention of seeking a worldly job. However, I have often fallen into an easy-going mediocrity, like a student who settles for B’s, since A’s require twice as much effort (I’m a B+ student). As a result, God’s word is easily smothered in my sins of hypocrisy and complacency. I know and believe that Jesus is my Lord and King. Yet I also know that I need to die to my self-saving and self-serving desires daily to bear good fruit in Christ. I need to renew my attitude and mission as a treasure-hunter and treasure-holder. I need to bring out new treasures as well as old through honest, sincere repentance and delight in God’s word.

Jesus had many fierce enemies who were bad weeds and bad fish. But Jesus did not despair. Jesus sowed good seed in the world by proclaiming the message of the kingdom through raising disciples. Jesus had hope and faith that through his disciples the message of the kingdom would prevail, for he saw God who reigns as the King and Judge. Many young people say that life is so boring and meaningless. They need the treasure of the kingdom of heaven. Then they can discover life that is new, abundant and joyful. This treasure is in Jesus Christ and the gospel of his salvation. Do you have this treasure? If so, are you helping anyone to find this treasure? Are you investing your time, resources and effort in eternity or in temporary, fleeting things in the world? This weekend over 100 young disciples of Jesus sacrificed their time and money to gather here for Bible study, testimony writing, fellowship and prayer. The messengers struggled hard with tears as prayer to grow as good ministers of Christ Jesus. I pray that they may continue to seek and hold the treasure of God’s kingdom. Those who treasure the kingdom of heaven have true joy, peace and meaning of life. Jesus says that they will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. May the kingdom of heaven be the real treasure of our hearts and lives through Jesus Christ.