

The Value of the Kingdom of Heaven

In this new series, I want to unpack two of Jesus' Kingdom parables: The Parable of the Hidden Treasure (Mt. 13:44) and The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price (Mt. 13:45-46). As we begin, it's important to set this teaching in a brief context. At this point in Matthew's gospel, Jesus is just over halfway through his second year of public ministry. Initially, the second year was a year in which he was widely popular among the common people. And yet, Jesus is increasingly coming into conflict with the Jewish leaders. For example, just prior to Jesus beginning his teaching on the parables of the kingdom, he heals a man who was "demon-oppressed, blind and mute." When Jesus heals the man, the people are amazed but the Pharisees are angered and attribute Jesus' healing of this man to "Beelzebul, the prince of demons."

At this point in Jesus' public ministry, there are specific reasons why he begins teaching in parables. Scholars note that the parables are designed for two primary purposes: *a. to reveal* and *b. to conceal* (13:10-17). They *reveal* the truth to those who, by grace through faith, have already trusted in Jesus. Their faith is small at first but, by God's grace, their hearts are open to hearing and believing further truth. Parables *conceal* the truth to those who have consistently refused to believe in Jesus and his teaching. Jesus has made it clear that he's the One that the Old Testament prophets had foretold; that he comes from the Father and yet, many continued to reject his message because of their increasingly hardened hearts.

Jesus begins chapter 13 with: *Parables of the Kingdom*. Keep in mind that the kingdom is a place ruled by the king. And, as is often the case, some don't want the king's rule. Jesus begins his teaching with; the *parable of the sower*. He describes a farmer who sowed seeds in four different types of soil. We're also given four common responses to Jesus preaching of the truth of God. 1). Some never understand the word 2). Others initially receive it with joy but later reject it when life gets difficult 3). A third group also hears but the world and its deceitfulness causes them to turn away 4). The fourth group hears, understands and bears ongoing fruit all their lives. A *second parable* about a sower (*the tares among the wheat*) addresses the fact that, as long as we're in this world there will be "good seed," people who are God's people, and "weeds," people who don't want God but ultimately want to follow Satan and wickedness.

Jesus' *third parable* (*the mustard seed*) is given to show that, although the kingdom may seem small at first like a mustard seed, it will continue to grow to be "a tree," beyond what many will expect. The *fourth*

parable; (the *parable of the leaven or yeast*) makes a similar point that the rule of Christ in this world continues to grow. This is a reminder to us: when we're discouraged, when we doubt, remember that the kingdom of heaven—God's rule in the hearts of people—will grow, even if almost imperceptible at times. We need to be *thankful* for this truth while also being *patient*. With this brief overview, we're now prepared for the two kingdom parables that we'll address in this series of articles beginning with:

—The Hidden Treasure

Look with me in verse 44: "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." Biblical historians note that, at this time in the first century, the people in the area in and around Palestine have faced numerous wars and raids by nations that sought to bring them under subjection. Because attacks by foreigners could come at any time, people who had anything of value would often bury it. Along with this, banking as we know it today was not available to them and they would often hide their money in the ground. So the *first* thing that we see is the fact that a man found a hidden treasure.

It's tempting for us to question the ethics of this man. He's found a treasure; he covers the treasure back up—presumably keeping everything secret. Some would suggest that he has an obligation to reveal his find to the current landowner. But, rather than that, he goes and sells everything that he has to buy the field because of this valuable treasure. What is Jesus teaching us? Simply stated, there's nothing of greater value than the Kingdom of Heaven and it's worth everything that we possess. We'll look further at this parable next time.

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