

The Hidden Treasure

In this series of articles we're looking at two of Jesus' kingdom parables from the gospel of Matthew. Last time I briefly summarized the kingdom parables leading up to the Parable of the Hidden Treasure in Matthew 13:44: "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." If our initial thoughts of this parable are in the context of the 21st century we may immediately question the ethics of this man. We may think that he has an obligation to tell the owner of the field about this magnificent treasure that he has uncovered.

Although there are differing views on this, some historians and scholars suggest that the ethics, as well as the law, of the 1st century would say that the person who found the treasure—not the landowner—had a right to the treasure that he found. Others dispute this and say that the ownership could be contested by the landowner if the treasure was very valuable. In the end we must remember that parables must be explained according to certain principles of proper interpretation. It's not necessary to find a biblical truth for every aspect of a parable. This can often run the risk of unbiblical allegorizing. What is of primary importance is to focus on the main point. Although some parables have two or even three points, this parable has one. Jesus' focus is on the value of the treasure not the ethics connected to property ownership. Allow me to give us something to ponder for a moment.

It's often been asked, "If your house caught on fire; and if you knew that your family was safe; and if you had time to go into the house before it was engulfed in flames, what valuable item would you most want to save from the fire?" Each of us would likely have different answers for this question but the point of the question is to get us to think of what it is that we hold dear; what do we value most? And this is the point of this parable. The treasure, not only brings great joy, but it's value makes it worth every sacrifice! Of course, Jesus has already told us what the treasure is; it's the kingdom of heaven—the rule of God totally over every aspect of our lives; from the time that we first come to saving faith in Jesus, to everyday decisions that touch our ongoing spiritual growth. Jesus' parable is teaching that God's rule over every single moment of our lives must be our single most important priority and will also be our joy.

Although I took the family out of the hypothetical question about the valuables in a house fire, unfortunately many Christians often place a priority on earthly family relationships rather than on God and following his word. Jesus addresses this issue on the same day that he began teaching these parables. Back in 12:46ff Jesus is speaking to the crowds and his "mother and his brothers" were asking to speak with him. Jesus makes it clear that his earthly family cannot have priority over the will of the Father. The point that we need to hear is this. The kingdom of heaven—God's rule over every aspect of our lives—is so important that all of the blessings of life, including family, are made better when God is the priority.

Sadly, for many, this valuable treasure of God's rule is hidden from them. They believe that their lives are going well and they have no need for *anyone* to rule over them. And yet,

according to Holy Scripture, if God is not ruling over us, we will find ourselves being the ruler of our own mini-kingdoms that we establish. And because we are sinners, left to our own devices we will always make a mess of things.

At this point I want to call our attention to something very important. We must not think that the language of “sells all that he has and buys the field” is teaching that we can somehow “purchase” our salvation based on our obedience to God’s word. None of our obedience can ever meet God’s perfect standard (Matthew 5:48). What are we to do? The gospel of the kingdom is that Jesus has already accomplished everything that’s needed for us to be right with God. It is God’s free grace in Jesus Christ alone that we must rest in by faith, not our own ability to save ourselves by what we do. The “kingdom of heaven,” God’s rule over every aspect of our lives is a wonderful treasure and it’s worth every sacrifice.

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