

Kingdom Parables

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

VI. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure - Matthew 13:44

A. The Central Point of the Parable

The acquisition of the Kingdom is personal. There are some who acquire the Kingdom not by searching for it, but by stumbling across it. Once found, however, nothing stands in the way of personally appropriating it.

B. Significant Elements of the Parable

1. The Field

The field is defined as the place in which the treasure was found.

Since there were no banks in those times as we know them, it was common to hide treasure by burying it in the ground. In fact, in the Parable of the Talents recorded in Matthew 25:14-30, the man who had one talent hid it in the ground. Because of the frequent wars and the uncertainty of the banks, hiding money in the ground was not uncommon.

2. The Treasure

The exact description of the treasure is not given. However, we can infer from the passage that it must have been very great. It was obviously great enough for the man to go through all of the trouble of selling his possessions to gain.

At this point, many say that the man was not ethical. They say that the ethical thing for him to do was to turn the treasure over to the owner of the field. By not doing so, they say that the man stole the treasure. This is unfounded for the following reasons:

- Rabbinic law stated that treasure or valuables found by a person belonged to the finder. This man's actions were in accord with Jewish law.
- The man did not take the treasure from the field even though he was technically entitled to it. Instead, he did a very ethical thing by buying the field before taking the treasure.
- The owner did not know the treasure was there since he made no effort to recover it prior to selling the field. If the treasure were his, he would have never sold the field without attempting to recover it.

Thus, the man was not unethical in the least. He was within the bounds of Jewish law, he did not take the treasure without buying the field, and he did not use part of the treasure to buy the field but used his own possessions.

3. The Man

The man is obviously a significant part of the parable. He is the one who finds the treasure and who goes through all of the trouble necessary to obtain it.

4. His Possessions

By examining the parable closely, we find that the possessions the man sold to gain the field are very important. In fact, it is ONLY by the selling of those possessions is he able to purchase the field.

C. Insignificant Elements of the Parable

None Given.

D. Interpretation of the Parable

1. The Field

Although it is not necessary to define the field to get the meaning of this parable, it is important to at least investigate if there is an interpretation that can be given to the field.

In examining the prior parables, it seems obvious that the best interpretation would be that the field represents the world. This would fit in with the Parable of the Tares, and the Parable of the Mustard Seed.

This interpretation would also fit in with the point of the parable, that being that the Kingdom is a very valuable treasure hidden in the world. (This also fits in with the Parable of the Leaven in which the leaven is "hidden" in the meal).

2. The Treasure

It is obvious from the context that the Treasure is the Kingdom of God.

That the Kingdom is pictured as being a treasure should be of no surprise. Isn't the Kingdom of value beyond human comprehension and understanding? Christ himself stated in Mark 8:36 "for what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Of importance in understanding this parable is recognizing the statement that the treasure was hidden. This parable, and the next of the Pearl of Great Price, serve as opposite examples of the personal appropriation of the Kingdom.

Note at this point the progression of the Kingdom Parables:

1. The Message of the Kingdom and it's reception (Parable of the Sower)
2. The Fruit of the Kingdom (Parable of the Seed Sown in Secret)

3. The Kingdom of God will be infiltrated with Tares which will be separated at the judgment (Parable of the Tares)
4. The Growth of the Kingdom (Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Parable of the Leaven)
5. The Personal Appropriation of the Kingdom (Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price).

This parable shows one way in which the Kingdom of God is appropriated. It shows that there are those who literally stumble across the Kingdom. In this parable, the man had no idea that the treasure was hidden in the field, he just happened across it. In the same way, there are many people today who have no idea that the Kingdom of God exists in this world, they just stumble across it.

As a preview, the next parable shows the opposite end. In that parable, the merchant is seeking for something of great value. This shows that there are some who are seeking for the Kingdom, and when they find it, they sell everything to get it.

As a further explanation of this point, Paul shows the same two sides in Romans 9:30-33. In this interesting passage, Paul makes the following points:

- The Gentiles, who did not seek righteousness, have obtained the righteousness which is of God by faith. In a sense, they "stumbled" upon the great truth of salvation by faith and not works.
- The Jews, who sought righteousness, did not obtain the righteousness of God because they did not obtain it by faith, but by works. They "stumbled", but in the sense that they missed God's righteousness for their own brand.

3. The Man

We do not need to say much here since we already said it above.

We should, however, reiterate the point that the man was not looking for treasure, he just happened to find it. As a result, he becomes a picture of those who just happen across the kingdom.

4. His Possessions

Once the man discovered the treasure in the field, he sold everything so that he could buy the field and obtain the treasure.

There are many people today who say that there is no cost to salvation. They say that Jesus paid it all; all we have to do is accept his payment. In fact, there are many who say that we do not even have to repent of our sins, we just need to accept God's offer of salvation with no strings attached.

This is only partly true. Although there is nothing we can do to EARN salvation, there is something we must do to APPROPRIATE salvation.

Several points need to be made about the above:

- It is NOT true that salvation is a free gift in the sense that we do absolutely nothing to obtain it.
- It IS true that God offers salvation apart from us earning it, but that is not to say that it is free.
- Anywhere we look in the Gospels, we find an associated cost to be a disciple of Christ. Probably the best example of this is the story of the rich young ruler found in Matthew 19:16-22. In that story, we find the young ruler asking Christ what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Instead of giving him the obvious answer, Christ hit him in the area of his submission. As it turned out, the young ruler was not willing to forsake all to follow Christ.
- In other passages, particularly Matthew 8, Christ turns away would-be disciples who want the glamour and the glory, but are unwilling to trade all of the comforts for it. Christ does not want men to follow him unless they are willing to forsake all.
- Salvation is always accompanied with a desire on the part of man to submit to the lordship of Christ. Someone who wants salvation but is unwilling to part with their sin cannot be saved.
- To summarize the above point, we receive salvation when we trade all that we have for all that God has. There is a transaction made. We trade trust in ourselves and our sin for the forgiveness of God.
- Underlying all of this, we need to understand that it is ultimately God who saves us by his own sovereign will, but part of that salvation is a submission to the lordship of Christ. We may not understand all that it means, but we are willing to submit no matter what the cost.

The Man in this parable was willing to trade everything he had for the field. This symbolizes the fact that when one stumbles across the Kingdom and sees it for what it is, they are willing to forsake everything to gain the Kingdom. Furthermore, just as the man in this parable could not have his possessions and the field, so a man today cannot keep his sin and still have Christ. It is one or the other.

E. Application of the Parable

1. There are many who find the Kingdom of God, not by seeking for it, but by stumbling across it.
2. Once a man is impressed with the true value of the Kingdom, he is willing to give up anything to possess it.