

Introduction

This morning our attention is on the parable of the treasure in Matthew 13.44: **The kingdom of heaven is like 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.**

This is another kingdom parable that is very brief and that has no recorded explanation. To interpret the parable we have to work with three guiding contexts: the parable of the Sower helps us understand all the parables, the parables of Matthew 13 are a framework for the parable of the treasure, and the gospel of the NT as a whole serves as a broad thematic context. We have to keep looking at the Sower, the other parables, and the NT gospel so we can do our best work of interpretation. With these matters of context in mind, we will cover three things regarding this parable: the central elements, the basic theme, and the main point.

1A. The central elements of the parable

Surveying the details of the parable, a number of things stand out: the element of hiddenness, the imagery of the field, the actions of the man in the parable, and the joy of finding. We can cover these elements or details one at a time.

1) Hiddenness reminds us of the reoccurring theme in the Gospels regarding the nature of the coming of the kingdom of God. It has a remarkable lack of the obvious. It comes in a way that is radically unexpected. The great promised King David rides into Jerusalem on a donkey in route to crucifixion as Son of Man and Son of God. Christ's kingdom is not of this world so His disciples do not take up the sword and fight. Now, in the time between (the time between Christ's resurrection and second coming) even the Christian's life is hidden with Christ in God (Co. 3.3).

2) Regarding the field, it is a piece of land that some unnamed person owns. There is good reason to conclude that it does not mean world, as it does in the parable of the weeds (13.38, where Jesus plainly says, "**the field is the world**"). It does not refer to the world in the parable of the treasure because the man buys the field by selling all that he owns. Thus, the only way that the field could represent the world would be if the man buying the field represents Christ buying, that is, *redeeming* the world in the process of saving His church as His treasure.

However, the idea of redeeming the world is highly problematic. If Christ paid the price to save the world, then His work on the cross would mean that no one would perish and all people will have salvation (then contrary to the parable, the treasure is equivalent to the field!). However, this does not correlate with the obvious fact that some people are sons of the evil one who perish in their sins (as we learn from the weeds parable, Mat 13.41-42).

To avoid universalism (the salvation of all people without exception), the buying cannot involve taking actual ownership; it must be reduced to a potentiality. "Buying" the field has to be put in quotation marks for there is no actual buying. Now here is the rub. If the work of Christ is a mere potentiality, then Jesus does not even take ownership of the treasure. In the parable, the man gives up all that he has to buy the field. If this illustrates the purchase of the world by the sacrifice of Christ, then to avoid the error of universalism, we would have to embrace the error that His work actually purchased nothing. Or should we say, it actually purchased no one; it only paid for a possibility of ownership. However, the parable teaches that the man actually took ownership of the field by paying the purchase price for it.

This way of trying to handle the parable serves as an excellent illustration of the error of universal redemption, of claiming that Jesus died for all. It shows that if Jesus died for all, then His work has to be a mere provision or potentiality. It shows further that His death secured the salvation of no one. Paying the price for a possibility of ownership means that there is no taking ownership of the world, even though He gave His precious blood as a payment for sinners. Scripture gives us a strong contrast to such a mistaken view of the death of Christ. It teaches that

Jesus secured the eternal redemption of those for whom died: **But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption** (Heb 9.11-12). He gave His blood as the great high priest to insure that His people **serve the living God** (Heb 9.14). By His death, Jesus secured eternal freedom from the bondage of sin for those for whom He paid the price of His precious blood.

Therefore, we should not take the parable as teaching that Christ paid the price by sacrificing all that He had to save every person in the world without exception.

If someone complains that we are trying to understand Matthew by means of Hebrews, the reply has to be in terms of the mustard plant parable as context for the treasure parable. Thus, what Jesus taught in the form of a seed is an organic unity with what we have in the mature plant of the apostolic NT. Just think about how little Jesus tells us regarding His death as a ransom payment for sinners. For example, where do we have a discussion of His death in the Sermon on the Mount? It is not there. Where does Jesus tell us about His crucifixion in the book of Matthew up to chapter 13? It is not there. That is, it is not there explicitly. It is implicit in His baptism. It is implicit in His temptation and in His promise of the forgiveness of sins. Even the fact of His coming death is not explicit until chapter 12 when He speaks of the sign of the prophet Jonah and being in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. In the entire book of Matthew, there are only a few references to His death for sinners, a central one being the institution of communion (Mat 26.26-29). The point is that we must interpret the teaching about our Lord's death in the Gospels by interfacing it with the passages about His death in His apostolic NT because that is how we understand the gospel first as seed then as tree (per the mustard plant).

Thus, before we can identify the man in the parable, we need to survey the details further.

3) Now let us turn our attention to the actions of the central figure. What does he do?

He finds a treasure in a field he does not own. He may be a tenant farmer who is plowing along when his plow hits something. Upon investigation, he discovers a treasure hidden there in the field. Perhaps, he is clearing rocks for planting, and in the process, he uncovers a pleasant surprise. There is no suggestion here that the man is looking for buried treasure. The most likely scenario is that he is farming in this field by agreement with the owner, and his work demands a good amount of plowing and digging. While doing his work, he unearths a hard object, and there before him lies a treasure.

What does he then do? First, he covers it up. He re-hides the treasure. It appears that he knows he has no right to the treasure because someone else owns the land. Therefore, in the second place, he goes and sells all that he owns in order to buy the field. Why does he buy the field? He buys the field because of the treasure. He buys the field to obtain the treasure buried in it. This sounds devious. It is a bit shady. Of course, our Lord is not teaching us to do business in this way, shall we say, without full disclosure. This action in the parable is not about kingdom ethics. Actually, what we have is the use of an unethical practice to illustrate kingdom truth.

4) A final highlight to mention is the joy of this man's experience. Finding a treasure is a joy. I can remember to this day the excitement I had walking home from school on Wood Street in Melvindale, and seeing dollar bills (a ten, a five, and some one dollar bills!) blowing in the wind in front of me. I happily chased them down and looked for more. When you find something of value, you treasure it because it is a treasure. For the man in the parable, his joy moved him to re-hide the treasure, and to go and sell all his possessions to buy the field. It must have been quite a find. These details prepare the way to the theme of the parable.

2A. The basic theme of the parable

If we begin again with the parable of the Sower, we have to think that the basic theme is the gospel, the word of the kingdom that is comparable to this treasure. Notice that the kingdom is like this story; it is like what goes on in this story. Unquestionably, the gospel of Jesus is a storehouse of treasure. As Jesus told us in His closing comment on these parables, where He

said, "Have you understood all these things?" They said to him, "Yes." ⁵² And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (13.51-52). We can list a number of things that we can find in this storehouse beyond the broad and ultimate fact that it is new covenant and old, NT and OT.

1) It is the good news of salvation both now and not yet. The kingdom has come and will come. We are saved now in part in all of our relationships. We will be saved in the fullness of our being as inner man and outer man because the gospel of Christ works effectively, comprehensively, and completely until it leavens the entire batch of dough.

2) It is good news of Jubilee freedom in which Jesus says to the captives in sin, "Go forth" (cf. Lk 4 with Isa 61). He says regarding us what He said regarding Lazarus, "Set Him free" (cf. Jn 11).

3) It is a gospel of deliverance from eternal wrath.

With words we can never forget, Jesus told us that the harvest is the end of the world. At that time, He will separate the wicked from the righteous, ultimately and finally. The ultimate destiny of the wicked is the "fiery furnace" where "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mat 13.42). The thought of eternal punishment is breathtaking, mind repelling, and extremely difficult even to consider in a distant and summary way. From this conscious suffering without end, the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord and king delivers us.

4) It is glad news of a glorious harvest.

This treasure is the word of God that is honey in the honeycomb. It is God's saving word of promise that will bring us as His children and His righteous ones into the glory of heaven's noonday sun. As a matter of fact the good news is that as His children and righteous ones the gospel will cause us to "shine like the sun in the kingdom" (Mat 13.43; this is so because Jesus sows it in our hearts and causes it to work effectively in us without fail).

All of these things in the treasure store of the gospel of the kingdom cause us to speak of the great gospel feast that we partake of already and not yet. Jesus spread the table. There is more than enough on the table. There is plenty for multitudes beyond number. This is the gospel feast of joy and rejoicing in the acceptance of sinners by the good news of Christ the king.

What more can we say? By the gospel as a treasure, we have value, dignity, true humanness, self-identity, safety in its branches, and a secure dwelling place now and forevermore. So when Paul says in 1 Corinthians that "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him-these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit" (vs. 9-10), he is commenting on the Spirit-given gospel. Truly, the kingdom is like a treasure in its coming, but the good news it proclaims is so valuable, so full and complete, that we cannot take it all in. Not even half of what is in store for us has been told. We have only touched the hem of the garment. Thus, the afflictions of this world are "preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor 4.17). It is the gospel of the kingdom, the gospel of the grace of God in Christ, that Christ places in our hearts and that He causes to work effectively in us all the way to resurrection glory. Now we need to ask about the main point of the parable.

3A. The main point of the parable

When take in the picture of this parable in its entirety, it seems to boil down to this. In recognition of the treasure, the man personally appropriated the entire field to own the treasure as his very own. He does this joyfully, personally, and enthusiastically. Therefore, the main point is that sinners personally, joyfully, and enthusiastically will appropriate the gospel of the kingdom when they recognize it as a treasure.

We should weigh the facts of the case. The man did not obtain a right of access to the property; he already had that. He did not secure the prospect of some day buying the field (as a mere potentiality or possibility). No, he took possession of it in order to not hope, wish, or dream of the treasure, but to lay His hands on it in full and final ownership.

Therefore, when you see the kingdom as a treasure, you will joyfully, personally, and enthusiastically appropriate it. You will take hold of it, and cling to it for yourself, as your very

own. This is strikingly contrary to people who say they have faith but that merely wish and daydream about acceptance with God as Christians.

Clearly, when you recognize the kingdom's coming by the gospel, and when you see the good news as the promises of the great king of heaven and earth, then you will believe it. You will repent, you will turn away from your sins, you will submit to the authority of Christ, you will obey Him in baptism, you will press into the kingdom, you will seize it as a prize, you will strive to enter by the narrow way. You will say, "I gladly, willingly, and thankfully submit myself, Lord Jesus, to your absolute authority over me." You will say this when you begin the Christian life and you will say this at all the forks in the narrow road. You will say, "O Lord Jesus, I cling to you as the great high priest of my soul, and I will continue to cling to you through 'thick and thin' by your grace." When you see the kingdom as a treasure, you will search after the gospel of Jesus like someone searching after silver and gold (cf. Prov 2.1-10).

The bottom line is that when you see the value of the gospel of the kingdom as a treasure, you will make an absolute, unconditional, unreserved, totalitarian commitment of yourself to Jesus Christ as your sovereign Lord and Sabbath king, and you will reiterate that commitment day by day in the challenges and struggles that you face in life.

Concluding remarks

We can bring these thoughts about kingdom appropriation to a close by emphasizing some things about the relation of the gospel to our possessions. We do this because the text says, "in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Mat 13.44). Perhaps, it would be better to talk about how we think about the gospel in relation to how we think about all the things that we have.

1) This parable teaches us about detachment.

It teaches us about the detachment that will govern our thinking when we recognize the kingdom as a treasure, when we treasure the gospel of Jesus our king, and thus when we treasure Jesus our king. The text says that the man sells all that he has. However, this does not lead him to either the poor house or the monastery. Why is that the case? In the parable, the man sells everything he owns in order to buy the field and obtain the treasure. Thus, he still owns things, but now, all that he owns, he owns for the sake of the treasure. He owns the field for the treasure. Likewise, the Christian sells all his possessions including his very soul in order to bring all that he has into a subordinate relationship to the kingdom of God. He orients all that he owns to the gospel treasure that he appropriates by putting all that he possesses and all that he is into a place of submission to Christ as king.

2) This defines true Christian faith. The appropriation of Christ is exclusive. His authority as king is ultimate and final. You submit all things to Him. Whatever you obtain, you obtain it in a way that honors Christ, and you seek it to use it in a way that glorifies Him.

3) This is the way to find joy and contentment in all that we possess as we journey through life. The way to joy is to recognize the matchless worth of Christ and to make the choice of love for Him above all earthly things. This is the way of contentment and peace in regard to the things of life. It is the way of joy and rejoicing, simplicity, clarity of thought, and rest of soul.

4) Thus, there is no sacred-secular here in the Christian experience of the treasures of the gospel. Things, money, possessions are not evil. No, there is only the sacred because all things belong to Christ and therefore all things are yours in Him.

Therefore, let us fall down before the majesty of Christ our king, to worship and glorify Him in all the things, possessions, and affairs of our lives. To Him be glory both now and forevermore. Amen.