



**The Parables of Jesus**  
**The Parables of the Present Kingdom, Part 2**  
**The Parable of the Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44)**  
**The Parable of the Pearl of Great Value (Matthew 13:45-46)**

We've all heard stories of those people who happen to buy something at a garage sale or at a flea market simply because they like it and come to find out that what they had purchased was worth a lot of money – well over the amount paid. And there are others who actually know that what they have found is a treasure and can hardly contain their excitement and their joy until they are out of the presence of the seller. Klyne Snodgrass tells one such story in *Stories With Intent* about a man name Roy Whetstine. Mr. Whetstine was a rock collector who had found a potato-sized rock at a rock show. It was in a bin with other rocks under a sign that read, "Any stone \$15." However, the seller actually lowered the cost to \$10 since this particular rock wasn't as pretty as some of the others. So, Mr. Whetstine purchased this rock for \$10 and could barely contain himself because what he actually had was a 1509-carat star sapphire presumably valued around 2.5 million dollars. Indeed, a treasure!

The parables in this lesson present the kingdom of God as something that is precious. It is something that should be sought and is worth far more than any amount of money that could be paid.

We have grouped these two "Parables of the Present Kingdom" together because, while there are some differences, the point of each parable is the same – to emphasize the value of the kingdom of God. These parables are both similitudes – that is, they are extended similes or analogies and yet, unlike a narrative, they lack plot development.

The parables that were the focus of our previous lesson were told by Jesus to encourage His followers in regards to the reality of the kingdom. That is to say, many

were asking the question, "if the kingdom has come, why is there still evil in the world." Jesus tells these parables to show that despite the presence of evil in this world the kingdom has come and that He will, at the end, deal with that evil. Those parables addressed doubts concerning Jesus' proclamation and announcement that the kingdom had come. Again, to be clear, the reality of the present or inaugurated kingdom does not mean that it has already come in its fullness or in its consummation. There is still more yet to come.

It was mentioned last week that there were a few reasons why there was confusion over the kingdom of God. One was because there was a misconception of the nature of the kingdom. The Jews thought that when Messiah came, He would trample all their political enemies and free them from tyranny. But the reality of the kingdom is as Jesus says, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world" (John 18:36). Jesus, the Messiah, did come to defeat the enemy and free His people from tyranny. And He did just that. Yet, that enemy and tyranny ultimately was death and sin. Paul says in Romans 8:2, "For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death." This was the mission of Jesus Christ, to save His people from their sin. When the Jews, or anyone for that matter, didn't understand their need of justification, it led to a misunderstanding of the purpose of Jesus Christ.

The other reason there was confusion regarding the kingdom of God is

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because of the reality of the two-stage development of the kingdom of God. We have called it, “the already and not yet” aspect of the kingdom of God. Because in this stage of the kingdom there were things that hadn’t come to pass of which the prophets had spoken, it was assumed, incorrectly, then, that the kingdom hadn’t come. But this is rightly understood with the two-stage model. Christ has come and has inaugurated His kingdom. There is a present reality to the kingdom of God to which these parables so clearly speak. And yet, as we learned last week as well, there is also that to which we still look forward to in consummation.

Yet, it wasn’t only these two things that led to confusion regarding the kingdom of God. There were people in the 1<sup>st</sup> century as well as those today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that would say, “When the kingdom of God comes, it will be obvious. No one would need to search for it.” Again, in its consummated state, that might be true but in its inaugurated state, the kingdom of heaven is something that can be found; therefore, it is something that also can be hidden. This is the reality to which these two parables in this study speak.

We will look a little differently at these parables in this lesson that we have in the past. These parables serve well to remind us of how to read parables and the dangers in hermeneutics that often arise in the interpretation of them. It presents some rather complex issues and yet the parables themselves are really rather simple and straightforward. So for our instruction and edification, let’s look at some of those complexities in translation and then to the simplicity of the parables meaning.

### COMPLEXITIES IN TRANSLATION

These two parables serve well to illustrate the dangers in attempting to use parables in a way that Jesus never meant for them to be used. It is a temptation to assign certain correspondences to each noun or verb or section of the parable rather than

looking at it as a whole. In other words, in some parables the correspondence is plain and clearly intended by the author. Yet here, to say, “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure in a field” and then stop and attempt to assign a correspondence to the “field” would be an error. To what does the field correspond? Would it be to the “kingdom of heaven?” No, because Jesus is not saying that it is like “a treasure in a field.” He is saying, it 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.” In other words, the correspondence is between the kingdom of heaven with ALL that then follows. If we stretch it to mean something else, we are left to answer unintended questions such as, “Was it right for the man to cover up the treasure and not tell the owner and then go buy it?” This is not presented as an ethical dilemma in the parable and yet we have made it into one and therefore answer a question that wasn’t intended.

Moreover, if one were to do this, what assignation would be given to the man? Whom does he represent - the one that finds that treasure? Of course, but that’s who he is in the parable. He needs no correspondence.

Likewise, in The Parable of the Pearl of Great Value, is the kingdom of heaven like a merchant? Well, it is like a particular kind of merchant but not any ol’ merchant. In fact, merchants were not very well respected people in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. They were often seen as those who couldn’t keep from doing wrong and they were those who weren’t innocent of sin. Certainly, the kingdom of heaven is not like a crafty and dishonest merchant! Of course not, that’s misreading the parable. The parable again, is not giving a moral or ethic as to how to live.

Another popular error in reading

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these parables is to assume that these parables are teaching how to enter or to gain the kingdom of heaven. It is an attempt to use this parable as a means of teaching the way of salvation. There is a common theme in both of these parables. Both speak of selling all that one has and buying either the field in the one or the pearl in the other. To make a one-to-one correspondence between the kingdom of heaven and the field in “The Parable of the Hidden Treasure” or the pearl in “The Parable of the Pearl of Great Value” would be to put forth the idea that the kingdom of heaven could be bought. It would be like the lady in Led Zeppelin’s “Stairway to Heaven” of whom the song says, “There’s a lady who’s sure all that glitters is gold, and she’s buying the stairway to heaven.”

But the things of God cannot be bought. Simon the Magician learned this in Acts 8 where the Scripture says, “Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’ But Peter said to him, ‘May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money’” (Acts 8:18-20).

The giving up of all that one has for the sake of the kingdom isn’t done as a means of entering it but speaks to the exceeding worth of kingdom of heaven. This, therefore, leads to the simplicity of its meaning.

### SIMPLICITY OF THE PARABLES’ MEANING

As stated above, the meaning of these two parables is quite simple; the kingdom of heaven is worth everything one has. Everything else pales in comparison to the value of the kingdom. While the main point is very simple indeed, there is also a secondary application that is closely related to it. As was mentioned previously, both parables have as part of their theme the selling of all that one has. We have already

determined that this is not a means by which to gain the kingdom or to enter the kingdom but we might ask if there’s a sense in which this speaks to the cost of discipleship. In other words, does this tell us that in order to enter the kingdom, one must be willing to give up all that he or she has? Is it related to the teaching of Jesus with the rich, young ruler to whom He says, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Mark 10:21)? And of course, the story follows, “Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (Mark 10:22). The rich, young ruler loved the things of this earth more than he desired the things of God. This is the relationship between value and the cost of discipleship. There is a cost of discipleship alluded to in these parables because cost and value exist in relationship. If one values something, he is willing to give up something else for it. Our whole system of exchange is based on this principle. If I desire a new car and value that car, I will pay or give up my money or trade what I do have in order to receive it. And that exchange then, because of my desire for the thing, or the value I place on it, is not a burden, but a great joy. So, is there a cost? Yes, but compared to the incomparable worth of that which is received, how can one say there is a cost? There is no loss. This is the point of these two parables.

Again, while there is that application of cost, that is not the main thrust and emphasis of the parables. It is, again, the value of that which is gained. It is the surpassing value of the kingdom of heaven. It is worth “giving up” or “selling” all that one has in order to receive it. And there is no sadness or loss in that which is “given up.” This is the point of The Parable of the Hidden Treasure where the man, “in his joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” Often, when people make big

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purchases there is what is often called buyer's remorse. That is that deep sense of regret after making a purchase. It can be for several reasons but one reason is the doubt concerning the value of that which was purchased. There is no buyer's remorse with the kingdom of heaven. There is great joy not in the anticipation, in the exchange itself, and in the subsequent "new living conditions."

These parables are not about sacrifice, and that's what we usually assume when we speak about cost. There is no sacrifice with the kingdom of heaven because the one who finds it receives something of such greater value than what had been given up. There is no comparison between the two things – this is part of the purpose of the parable. This speaks to the infinite value of the kingdom of God. And of course, whether this is in the 1<sup>st</sup> century or in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, people do need to be reminded of the infinite value of the kingdom. For those in Jesus' time, the kingdom didn't look all that impressive to them because it was so different in nature than what they had expected. And yet, Jesus, much like in our previous study, is reminding His hearers that while it may not look like much at this point in history, it still is present, things are going along exactly as they should, and the kingdom is invaluable. It is worth giving up all one has!

Does the world not need to be reminded and told that very same thing today? Particularly here in the west with all the material blessings and creature comforts that we have, could the kingdom of heaven really outweigh all that in value? And still today, Jesus would say it is worth selling all one has to receive it!

In the introduction, I told the story of Mr. Whetstine and his star sapphire. How exciting that would be to find a "find" like that! And yet, there's a not so happy end to that story. About a year and a half later, Mr. Whetstine still had that "rare find" in his possession and nothing else to show for it. Apparently, the value of the stone had been greatly inflated by a jewelry store owner who had been kicked out of the American Gem

Society over complaints that he had inflated appraisals. The consensus of gem experts regarding the value of the stone had greatly reduced and can be summarized by one gem expert, "I don't think the word million can enter the conversation. I don't think six figures can enter the conversation. I think the (amount) would be in the five figures. It is not what it has been made out to be. It's nice to see, it is an oddity . . . but that's it."

An oddity! From 2.5 million to an oddity. Think about the remorse you would have if you had bought that! It was thought to be of great value but ended up being not much more than a odd looking, potato-sized, rock. So it is with the things of this world. What is of supreme value to you - those things that in the end turn out to be useless or those things that endure into all of eternity? Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is of inestimable value – worth everything you might have to gain it. Have you got it?



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