

**Kingdom Parables:  
The Pearl of Great Price and the Hidden Treasure  
Mt 13:44-46**

BACKGROUND

- Regarding the treasure: “People in Palestine often hid treasures, which might remain concealed if the hider died before he could retrieve them. Thus hidden treasure became a prominent motif in Near Eastern folklore exciting the imagination of peasants for whom it represented the ultimate dream” [Craig Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Eerdmans, 1999), p. 391].
- “Probably the central character of this parable was a peasant working a wealthy landowner’s field who when plowing turned up a strongbox or jar containing coins” (Keener, 391).
- The man was within his rights hiding the treasure and buying the field. According to rabbinic law, ‘If a man finds scattered money, it belongs to the finder’ [M. Green, *The Message of Matthew* (IVP, 2000), p. 159].
- Regarding the pearl: “The... man is a wholesale dealer who probably pays a small fee to examine a huge pile of oysters” (Gary DeLashmutt).

QUESTIONS

1. List some properties of the treasure and the pearl. (E.g., they are very valuable.)
2. The main characters in each of these parables are motivated in a positive way to obtain the kingdom. That is, they are seeking to obtain something valuable, rather than trying to avoid something dire (approach vs. avoidance?). Elsewhere, certainly, parables warn more than they offer, as in the parable of the sower.

Is your faith more characterized by pursuit (of the kingdom, of a relationship with God, of the blessings of the kingdom, etc.) or avoidance (of sin or its consequences, of the World, of damnation, etc.)?

3. “So the message of these twin parables is clear. People find the kingdom in many ways. Some come upon it by accident, some after a long and patient search. But it is immensely worthwhile however we come on it” (Green, p. 160). Did you find the kingdom by accident, by searching, or by a third way?
4. Gary DeLashmutt writes,<sup>1</sup>

The reason why some recognize [the kingdom’s] value while others do not is not God’s desire, but people’s attitude. Your valuation of the gospel is determined by your own pride or humility. Paul makes this point in 1 Cor 1:18-31...

This was certainly the case with me. I understood the meaning of the cross from the time I was 12. But my estimation of its value was directly related to my confidence in myself. When I was full of myself, convinced that I had within myself all the goodness and power to direct my life, I looked upon this message as irrelevant...a foolish crutch for losers. But when God broke me down to make me see my own lostness and moral bankruptcy, the exact same message took on a completely different value.

Discuss.

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<sup>1</sup> Xenos Christian Fellowship, Columbus, OH; <http://www.xenos.org/teachings/topical/parables/gary/parables-3.htm>.

5. Central to both parables is the need to expend all one's valuables to obtain something immeasurably greater, the kingdom. Green (p. 160) gives the following example:

One thinks of Justin in the early second century, a brilliant professor who had tried all the philosophical schools and remained unsatisfied. One day he met a little old man in the fields who told him about Jesus. He immediately started reading the Scriptures to see if this was so. He was convinced, and he became a joyful Christian, even though later on it led to his martyrdom. After a long search, he had found the pearl of great value.

What did you sacrifice to obtain the kingdom? What does a typical north-American convert stand to lose? (See Lk 14:33, Phil 3:7-8.) The cost of discipleship is higher in some cultures than in others. How much relevance does this parable have for us?

6. The first enthusiasm with which we pursue the kingdom may not last. In the words of C. S. Lewis,

Many religious people lament that the first fervors of their conversion have died away. They think—sometimes rightly, but not, I believe, always—that their sins account for this. They may even try by pitiful efforts of will to revive what now seem to have been the golden days. But were those fervors—the operative word is *those*—ever intended to last?

...And the joke, or tragedy, of it all is that these golden moments in the past, which are so tormenting if we erect them into a norm, are extremely nourishing, wholesome, and enchanting if we are content to accept them for what they are, for memories. Properly bedded down in a past which we do not miserably try to conjure back, they will send up exquisite growths. Leave bulbs alone, and the new flowers will come up. (From *Letters to Malcolm*, pp. 26-27.)

Discuss.

7. From Capon's *Parables of the Kingdom* (Eerdman's, 1985):

The woman who walks out of Bendel's with a \$15,000 mink and the man who pulls into the driveway with a brand-new, cream-and-gold Rolls Royce Corniche are not, in that moment at least, gloomy characters. And to bring the parable full circle, neither are the salespeople who closed the deals on such fabulous purchases. There is *joy* in heaven over one sinner than repents, not a lot of hand wringing and brow-furrowing, and certainly not a boring "watch your step now" lecture from the divine counterparts of Bendel, Rolls and Royce.

Therefore, there should be at least smiles in the church over the same happy turn of events. Not because we have made a buck, and not, God forbid, because we have compassed sea and land to make a proselyte; but only because the customers are satisfied—because they have put on the mink of righteousness, sat down in the Rolls Royce of salvation, and are not just laughing themselves silly over the incongruous wonderfulness of it all.

What do you think? Did the parables of the sower and the weeds (and later, the net) leave you with a festive mood?

*Fun Fact:* The Jimmy Buffet song "Margaritaville" (which topped the charts at #1 in 1977) is named for the tequila-based cocktail, the name of which probably (cf. Webster's 9<sup>th</sup> New Collegiate Dictionary) originated (in 1963) from the woman's name *Margarita*, the Spanish equivalent of *Margaret*, which derives from the Greek word for pearl, *margarites* (μαργαριτης).