

Finding and Gathering

“So, you’re going to be a cliché?” joked Roscoe. Owen was at his weekly coffee morning get-together with a small group of male friends. Owen had joined the group when he retired five months ago.

Owen was moving to West Palm Beach, where his first cousin, Emmett, lived. When Owen first visited Emmett three years ago, he was struck by the number of homeless people. Every time Owen visited, he seemed to see more.

“That is because the numbers keep rising,” said Emmett.

Emmett began working with a local ministry two years ago to find housing and provide services, including counseling and Christian outreach, to the homeless.

As Owen grew older, it seemed like the desire to share the Gospel and the Good News of heaven grew stronger. Owen knew what heaven meant to him. He had shared his faith and the hope of heaven repeatedly with his coffee club. There were only two—one of whom was Roscoe—who said they didn’t subscribe to “religious life.”

“Man, do you make enough money to live in West Palm Beach?” asked Roscoe.

“I’ve cashed in everything,” answered Owen. “My cousin is doing good work with the homeless. I know I’m going to heaven because of Christ. I want to help bring other people with me. Everybody needs a home on earth, but what’s more important is a home in heaven. It’s worth more than anything in this world.”

1. *What is the difference between distracted and undistracted commitment to the kingdom of heaven?*

2. *What things are so important to us that we find them difficult to give up?*

3. *What riches will we find as we give up more of ourselves to live in His kingdom?*

LESSON FOCUS: The kingdom of heaven: Live like it’s worth everything you have and more.

The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

Matthew 13:44-46, KJV

44 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls:

46 Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

Matthew 13:44-46, NIV

⁴⁴“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. ⁴⁵Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

⁴⁶When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

Inside the house near the Sea of Galilee, Jesus continued to tell parables to this more intimate group of followers. He began with two short parables, both comparing the kingdom of heaven to discoveries of great value—so great that one who found it would sell everything else he had to own it. While the main characters in these two parables—and thus, the parables’ specific interpretation—are often debated, there is much to consider from both perspectives.

First, Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a “treasure hidden in a field” (vs. 44). Upon discovering this treasure, the man in this parable “hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field” (vs. 44). Burying or concealing treasures was not uncommon in Bible days due to a lack of modern-day banks, and no doubt there were treasure-hunters even in those days. However, Jesus was not emphasizing the seeming initial covetousness of the man, but his joy, good fortune, even “dumb luck” (although not from God’s sovereign perspective) in discovering this treasure—so much so

that everything else he owned was worth less in his view. Therefore, this man was willing to give up everything else he had to acquire the field—and thus, the treasure.

Jesus went on, declaring similarly that the kingdom of heaven was like “a merchant looking for fine pearls” (vs. 45). Again, when the man “found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it” (vs. 46). And again, the emphasis was not upon the man acquiring more, but upon being willing to surrender everything else for this one thing “of great value.”

Whatever else Jesus was trying to say in these two parables, it was clear that the kingdom of heaven was to be valued above all other things. Certainly, the apostle Paul’s words in Philippians 3:7-8 a couple decades later echoed this perspective: “But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.”

4. *Where was Jesus as He told these parables? Who was He speaking to?*

5. *What did Jesus compare the kingdom of heaven to in these two parables?*

6. *What was the basic message of these two parables?*

The Parable of the Net, a Check for Understanding, and a Double Blessing

Matthew 13:47-52, KJV

47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind:

48 Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.

Matthew 13:47-52, NIV

⁴⁷“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.

⁴⁸When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish

49 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just,
50 And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

51 Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.

52 Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.

in baskets, but threw the bad away.⁴⁹This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous⁵⁰ and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied.

⁵²He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

After the previous two parables, Jesus returned once more to a theme He had spoken of previously in this set of parables—the fates of the wicked and the righteous. Much like the parable of the wheat and the weeds studied in the last lesson (vss. 24-30, 36-43), Jesus spoke of a time of gathering, of mixed results, and of final separation. This time, He compared the kingdom of heaven to "a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish" (vs. 47). Other translations use the more specific word "dragnet"—a net that was not just thrown into the sea but went to the bottom, dragging up everything. Once the net was full, "the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away" (vs. 48).

This time, Jesus went directly to the interpretation: "This is how it will be at the end of the age" (vs. 49). The fishermen in this parable were angels, who would separate the

wicked from the righteous. And just as they had in the parable of the wheat and the weeds, the angels would cast the wicked “into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (vs. 49; compare vs. 42). Jesus then asked His listeners point-blank, “Have you understood all these things?” If there had been any confusion among His followers before, there did not appear to be any now: “ ‘Yes,’ they replied” (vs. 51).

Jesus concluded His discourse with what they thought initially was a change of subject but was really a culmination of all He had said. Apparently, those still listening included teachers of the law—who (hopefully) had come to realize that Jesus was the fulfillment of its teachings. Those who heard these parables and believed, Jesus said, were “like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old” (vs. 52). As the Gospels made clear, not every teacher of the law became a disciple in the kingdom of heaven—but those who did were doubly blessed: they knew both the promise of God and its fulfillment.

Another possible explanation is that Jesus was saying once His followers have understood His teachings, ought to share Christian wisdom with others. The house owner stands for a knowledgeable Christian, the storeroom stands for the heart, and the treasures stand for teaching. The mention of “new treasures as well as old” reflects that Jesus (the new) fulfills the Hebrew Scriptures (the old).

As we learn more about the Savior, we have a responsibility to share what we have gathered. Are we sharing our treasures or keeping them in the storeroom where they do no good?

7. *What illustration did Jesus use for this last parable?*

8. *How did Jesus interpret this parable?*

9. *How did Jesus conclude His discourse? What is significant about this?*

Kingdom Living

This lesson encourages us to consider what it means to focus on Jesus and the kingdom of heaven. The first two parables add to Jesus' teaching about how to fulfill the greatest commandment: "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37). When we seek the kingdom of heaven, we practice commitment to living a kingdom life.

In these two parables, Jesus emphasized the value of seeking and finding. The kingdom of heaven and the life it offers is worth everything we have and more—if we trade everything of value in our life, the kingdom of heaven is worth still more than that. What makes that pearl one of "great price"? Or the goods buried in the field "treasure"? A pearl has natural beauty and needs no external refining. Treasure may not only be valuable, but also hidden or lost and rediscovered as something reclaimed. Each has value that potentially could be traded for something of great worth.

In the third parable, Jesus compared those who seek the kingdom of heaven (good fish) with those who do not seek God (bad fish). They may all be caught together in the net for now, but in the end, they will be separated by angels.

Jesus' audience included His disciples as well as teachers of the law. Anyone who heard His words, believed, and stepped into the kingdom of heaven would receive the blessings of the Kingdom.

10. *How does having an undistracted commitment to the kingdom of heaven relate to the greatest commandment?*

11. *How and why is the kingdom of heaven like a pearl of great price or a treasure?*

12. *Why is it important to live with an awareness of the value of the kingdom of heaven?*

Share the Treasure of the Kingdom

We must learn to live as if the kingdom of heaven is worth everything we have by gaining and practicing an appreciation for all the riches we have in God's kingdom. It's a banquet, but we usually settle for crumbs instead. That's what Satan wants us to do—serve God as little as possible and share the Kingdom with as few people as possible.

► *Make a plan to serve someone in a specific way this week. What is something you are willing to give up to someone else to have more of the Kingdom yourself? What wisdom can you share with someone else about living more for the Kingdom?*

KEY VERSE

Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.
—Matthew 13:52, KJV

He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."
—Matthew 13:52, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of July 31 through August 6

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** John 3:1-9—You Must Be Born Again.
- Tues.** John 3:10-21—God Loves the World.
- Wed.** Matthew 16:21-28—Take Up Your Cross.
- Thurs.** Isaiah 44:21-28—God Sweeps Away Our Sins.
- Fri.** Isaiah 59:1-8, 15-21—God's Spirit and Words Remain.
- Sat.** Titus 3:1-8—Rebirth and Renewal through the Spirit.
- Sun.** Galatians 5:13-26—Called to Freedom.