

**SERIES:**                **The Good News as Reported by Matthew**  
**SERMON:**            ***The Parables of the Hidden Treasure, the Pearl, and the Net***  
**SCRIPTURE:**        **Matthew 13:44-58**  
**SPEAKER:**         **Pastor Dick High**  
**DATE:**                **February 3, 2008**

Today is the third consecutive Sunday that the sermon will be drawn from Matthew 13. The majority of that chapter contains parables that Christ taught about the kingdom of heaven. Prior to looking at our text for today, I want to spend some initial time talking about the use of parables.

In its general sense a parable is a brief, succinct story, in prose or verse that illustrates a moral or religious lesson. Jesus did not invent the parable. Some can be found in the Old Testament. There are other examples of parables found outside the Scriptures. One does not need to look hard to find what some consider to be modern-day parables.

Consider this example; a parable about a frog. A frog was hopping around a farmyard, when it decided to investigate the barn. Being somewhat careless, and maybe a little too curious, he ended up hopping into a pail half-filled with fresh milk. As he swam about attempting to reach the top of the pail, he found that the sides of the pail were too high and steep for him to escape. He also tried to stretch his back legs to push off the bottom of the pail but found it too deep. Although his options for escape appeared minimal, at best, he did not lay idly in the milk. He swam and kicked and squirmed until at last, all his motion had turned the milk into a big chunk of butter. The butter became a platform from which he could hop out of the pail!

Now, if we were a contestant on “Who Wants to be a Millionaire?” and were asked what was the title of this parable, here would be our options. A. “Look before you leap,” B. “The curdling property of milk,” C. “A hop, a plop, and a glop,” or D. “Never give up.” (And the answer is: “Never give up.”)

What’s my point? As we open our Bible today to Matthew 13, I want us to do so with the understanding that when we read the parables of Christ recorded there, what we read is far more than a winsome story illustrating a moral or religious lesson. In the use of parables Christ does employ a recognized and acceptable means of teaching. A parable does provide a good means of comparison. You may have noticed the repeated use of the word “like” in Matthew 13. But the real power in these parables here is the One who presents the parables; the person of Jesus Christ.

Additionally, these parables are part of the accepted canon of Scripture; they are the inspired Word of God. What they teach is truth. And it is truth that has eternal implications! So it is with entirely appropriate to read these verses now with the understanding that “this is the word of the Lord!”

The portion of that chapter that I will read at this time is verses 44-50. These are the final three of seven parables recorded in Matthew 13. 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.* 45 *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.* 46 *When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.*

47 *Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.* 48 *When it 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.* 49 *This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous* 50 *and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* (This is the Word of the Lord.)

## A Brief Restatement about the Kingdom

Before we examine these parables, all of which are about the kingdom of heaven, I want to briefly recall some foundational statements about the kingdom of heaven that Pastor Mike made last week. These statements are in answer to the question, “What *is* the kingdom of heaven that is the subject of these parables?” Regarding the phrase “the kingdom of heaven:” 1). It is not heaven itself, 2). It is not the millennial kingdom, and 3). It is not the Church. Rather, the kingdom of heaven *is* the rule of God in the hearts and lives of His people. Let me repeat that: The kingdom of heaven **is the rule of God** in the hearts and lives of his people. That rule begins and is established and extended within an individual’s life through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

### Kingdom Discovery (verses 44-46)

As we look at these parables we will consider the first two together. Both speak of discovery. What is discovered is deemed to be of such value that one is willing to give all they have to possess it.

Consider this background. In a time of history where there are no banks or safety deposit boxes, it was common for individuals to hide valuables by burying them in a field. If that individual died, whether of natural causes or because of war, or if that individual was forcibly move to another country, that hidden cache of valuables would remain unnoticed until the effects of weather would reveal it through erosion or it would be uncovered as someone tilled the field. It is also during this time in history when pearls were considered the most highly valued of gems and were often bought as investments. In the minds of Christ’s audience these were viable images of what could occur in life; people discovering something of great value.

As we envision these scenarios, and think about the words of the parables, it is important to state these cautions. First, as is the case with most of the parables he taught, Christ does not give the interpretation. Thus we must proceed with great care. Second, we must bring the truth of all Scripture to bear on any understanding we consider. If we don’t do that, we could erroneously conclude that in some situations it is an individual’s good fortune that they stumble upon the kingdom of heaven and in some situations it is someone’s trained, investigative eye that allows them to possess the kingdom of heaven. In both parables the work “bought” is found, which could erroneously lead to the belief that the kingdom of heaven can be purchased.

The Scriptures are repeatedly clear that possession of the kingdom of heaven is only through and on the basis of God’s grace. Ephesians 2:8 & 9 state that most clearly. *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.*

The point of these two parables is that possessing the kingdom of heaven is of such incomparable value that it is worth giving up everything one has. Stated another way, a personal relationship with God through faith in the forgiving work of Christ in His death and resurrection is a treasure without equal. Please turn three chapters ahead in your Bible to Matthew 16:26. *What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?* There is nothing of value that can compare to having the rule of God in your heart and life! That is the pointed testimony of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 3:7-8. *But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish...*

Although we must move on, **I encourage you sometime this week to take 15 minutes**, with your Bible open to these two parables, and **reflect on the incomparable value of a personal relationship with Jesus**

**Christ.** My desire is that you perhaps capture anew the reality that such a relationship it worth giving up everything you have.

### **Kingdom Realities (verses 47-50)**

Let's turn our attention now to the next parable. It begins in verse 47. It is identified as "The Parable of the Net." (When you hear that word today, don't think internet; think fish net!) The description here is of a quite large net that had sizeable weights at the bottom and floats at the top. It could easily be hundreds of feet long. It took a team of men to work with this net. It would be spread over an area of a lake covering as much as one half of a square mile. Every fish in front of the net would be drawn to the shore and eventually onto land. Once on land the fishermen sorted the fish, keeping some and throwing others away.

This parable reinforces and develops truth that is presented earlier in the chapter in the parable of the weeds. That is the parable, examined last Lord's Day, where a man sows good seed in his field. Subsequently his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat. When the owner's servants inquire about pulling up the weeds, they are told to wait and let the weeds and wheat grow together.

In that parable Christ gives the interpretation. Looking back to verse 37 here is what He says. *The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*

Compare that with what is now said in verses 49-50. *This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

A painting depicting this parable, done by Darlene Slavujac, captures my attention with the reality that these words of Christ convey. Only it won't be fish that involved; it will be people! This will be a real event, at a specified time, occurring at God's directive.

The similarities between this parable and the parable of the weeds are obvious and significant. Their difference is in their emphasis. The parable of the weeds gives more focus to the reality of coexistence, highlighting that the believer is still in the world although we are urged to not be off the world. The parable of the fish net focuses primarily on the ultimate separation that God will accomplish between those who are righteous and those who are evil.

This latter parable reinforces the sobering truth that there is an end of the age, at which time God will bring judgment in separating the wicked from the righteous, and what the wicked will experience as a result of that judgment is both conscious and intense. The Kittel Theological Dictionary of the New Testament refers to "gnashing of teeth" as *a despairing remorse which shakes the entire body*. It describes "weeping" as *a terror at the frivolously rejected goodness of God which is now irretrievably lost*. In the context of the parable of the hidden treasure and the pearl the impact of the parable of the net conveys the reality that some day blinders are stripped away where individuals now grasp that they have no hope of ever experiencing the incomparable treasure that was to be found in the kingdom of heaven.

Consider these words from John MacArthur regarding the parable of the net. *Men move about within that net as if they were free forever. In may touch them from time to time, as it were, startling them. But they quickly swim away, thinking they have escaped, not realizing they are completely and inescapably encompassed in God's sovereign plan. The invisible web of God's judgment encroaches on every human being just as that of a dragnet encroaches on the fish. Most men do not perceive the kingdom, and they do not see God working in the world. They may be briefly moved by the grace of the gospel or frightened by the threat of judgment; but they soon return to their old ways of thinking and living, oblivious to the things of eternity. But when man's day is over and Christ returns to set up His glorious kingdom, then judgment will come.*

## **Kingdom Responsibility (verses 51-52)**

At the conclusion of the parable of the fish net, Jesus directs a question to His disciples. It is found in verse 51, along with their answer. *"Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied.*

He inquires here if these men understand what He has been teaching, if they have been able to get their minds around that. Literally He is asking if they have brought the truth He has presented into "union," where it fits together and where they grasp it. Their answer is affirmative.

Verse 52 is Jesus' response to their answer. *He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."*

It is interesting that some commentators consider this verse a parable as well. Parable or not, when I first read it I knew I had to do some probing to ensure I myself understood what Christ said here. This is how I would unfold this verse. When Christ speaks here of a "teacher of the law" it is more of an informal usage than what you would find in other passages, such as Matthew 23. In that chapter He denounces individuals so named for their misuse and misapplication of Scripture. Here it is a broader usage that could encompass the disciples, individuals who had no formal education but were recipients of instruction from Christ. Notice further that the teacher of the law referred to here *has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven...* These would be individuals who had heard, knew, understood, and accepted what Christ had taught about the kingdom of heaven. The word "instructed" is of particular importance. It is often translated as "disciple." The Kittel Theological Dictionary of the New Testament states that this term *always implies the existence of a personal attachment which shapes the whole life of the one described as a disciple, and which in its particularity leaves no doubt as to who is deploying the formative power.* This is instruction that occurs in the formative context of a strong personal relationship with Christ. It is beyond merely intellectual understanding. It is understanding that penetrates the heart; that understands and submits to the deity of Christ.

It is every one in that position who is said to be *like the owner of a house.* This is a term of stewardship. It is someone who is in a position of overseeing that which belongs to someone else. It is the term used in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. Having being instructed in the truth of Scripture in the formative context of a personal relationship with Christ, these disciples have a reservoir from which they can teach others, whether that be truth with which they are already familiar, or additional truth that they will continue to learn and understand.

This really is a position that many of us occupy. I am thinking much broader than church staff or elected leaders or even a Sunday school teacher. As each believer grows in their relationship with and knowledge of Christ, we accumulate a storeroom from which God expects us to share with others. That is a position of stewardship that had nothing to do with finances.

We have stated that our mission as a church is “To glorify God through honoring His name, teaching His word, loving His people, and expanding His kingdom.” Every week our bulletin highlights that mission. In the fall of 2005 we offered our first Lay Bible Institute. That was initiated as one means of addressing the core value of teaching God’s word. I am not aware that we have a theme verse for our Lay Bible Institute, but Matthew 13:52 would be an excellent choice. Our intent and desire is that we provide means by which believers grow as disciples, a term that is intended to highlight more than just learning information. Our goal is a developing relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Kingdom Opposition (verses 53-58)**

Let’s quickly move to the final verses of this chapter. Here Jesus returns to his home town of Nazareth. Notice the reaction of the people. Verse 54 records that they were “amazed.” This is a strong term. They were stunned, they were jolted. And what does that lead to? The text tells us that they began to ask questions. To see what kind of questions, let’s read from the middle of verse 54. *“Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?” they asked. “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? Aren’t all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?”*

Verse 57 encapsulates the attitude behind these words when it states; *And they took offense at him.*” Literally they were scandalized! The word is built on a very graphic picture of taking a stick and using it to spring a trap shut. These individuals acknowledged Christ’s wisdom and miraculous powers, they are amazed at his teaching, yet their minds have sprung shut against the truth of who He is. They are trapped in their thinking about who Christ is and are unwilling to be released from that conclusion. They will not submit to the evidence of His identity, evidence that is powerful and compelling. They will not submit to the truth. They will not submit to the attesting miracles that He has done as indicators of His deity.

What tragic power unbelief has! Christ’s summary of this response is brief and pointed. *Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor.* Let’s read that again. *Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor.* “Honor;” it is a word that speaks of worth, of value.

We began this morning considering the incomparable value of coming into possession of the kingdom of heaven. Being forgiven, living in personal relationship with God through Christ is an incomparable gift. It was purchased at an incomparable price. I Peter 1:18-19 describes it in these words. *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*

The people of Christ hometown had this treasure right in their midst, yet they would not see its worth, its value. They are a living illustration of the seed which fell on the path and was snatched away. They are a sobering reminder of how actively weeds can grow right at the feet of the Son of Man.

## **Concluding Questions**

As we conclude this morning I will ask two questions. **First, what does my heart value?** The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price beg this question. I’m less interested in a quick answer this morning that in desiring that we ponder of this question. I suggest the following verses as a context for our reflection.

*As the deer pants for the streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? Psalm 42:1-2*

*I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. Psalm 40:1*

*O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land, where there is no water. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. Psalm 63:1, 5*

*Anyone who loves his father and mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Matthew 10:37-39*

*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6:33*

*For where your **treasure** is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:21*

### **What does your heart value?**

Now a second question: **How does my heart respond?** The genesis of that question occurred as I pondered the response of the people in Jesus' hometown. They were amazed, but they were offended. It is inaccurate to think that if an individual can somehow be wowed with the person of Christ they will believe. On a more personal level this second question is really asking what to I do with what I say I believe. We can say that we value Christ, but **what actions are generated out of our stated belief? How do I daily live out the chosen surrender of everything for the kingdom?**

I began today's message with a parable about a frog. I want to conclude with a question about a frog.

There were once three frogs on a log and one of them made a decision to jump. The question is, "How many were left on the log?"

The answer is three. The frog only made a decision, but there is no suggestion that he took any action!

It is inaccurate to assume that every decision we make leads to action. The implementation of a decision is the ultimate indication of the response of our heart to giving up everything for the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ.