

“Entering the Kingdom”
Matthew 13:44-58
May 20, 2018

INTRODUCTION:

Matthew has grouped Jesus’ parables together and treats us to 8 of them in this chapter. We’re looking today at the last four of these kingdom parables. I call them kingdom parables because most of them are introduced with the words “The kingdom of heaven is like...” Today’s parables are a fitting conclusion because they describe how we come to enter the kingdom. The basic answer is that we must desire the kingdom above all else and we must receive the kingdom by faith in Jesus.

I. Desiring the Kingdom

The two short parables occurring at the beginning of our text make identical points. A farmer and a merchant make some drastic changes in their lives, selling everything they have in order to acquire something they desire more than anything else. What’s more, this radical step of selling all is accompanied by joy, not the sorrowful emotion we would expect when someone makes such a change in life. Frederick Bruner summarizes both parables like this:

The leading point in both parables is the *joy* of the gospel. ‘Moved by joy’, each of the two men—the farmer and the businessman—changed his life completely, ‘sold absolutely everything he had,’ and bought the new precious reality. The first main point is this: *joy is the engine of change...* Neither the farmer nor the businessman thinks for a moment that he is making a sacrifice at all. Because of the surpassing value of the treasure in each case, selling was no sacrifice; it was smart business! (p. 47).

In the first parable, a farmer is plowing a field when his plow strikes something buried in the ground. Upon further exploration, he discovers that it is a type of safe filled with valuables. Remember that in Jesus’ day there were no such things as safe deposit boxes or even banks. If someone had need to leave their home for a season and was unable or unwilling to carry their valuables with them, they would often find some place to bury the treasure. But if something happened to this family while they were away, the secret of their treasure would die with them. Such a scenario is what is in view in this parable. And now this farmer has come upon the treasure. He examines it carefully and finds that its value is immense. But there is a problem. He doesn’t own the field where the treasure is buried. He could just take it, but that would put him at risk of having to share the treasure with the field’s

owner. So he puts the treasure back where he found it and proceeds to acquire the field as his own. In order to have enough money to buy it, he had to sell everything he had. He parted with much that had been precious to him, but nothing was held back. All must be liquidated regardless of his sentimental attachments to it. Only when all had been sold did he have enough money to purchase the field. His heart was filled with joy, though he had just parted with all his possessions, because the treasure was indisputably his now. If he wanted, he could buy back the possessions he had sold, and would still have many times more left over.

The second parable is similar. In this case, a pearl merchant is involved in the business he is always involved in—seeking out pearls to purchase and resell at a profit. One day, he happens upon the most amazing pearl he has ever seen. This is a man who is a professional. He knows pearls, and he knows this one is of unprecedented beauty and size. Like the farmer, he too must sell everything he has in order to purchase this prize. All of his stock of pearls must go as well as all of his personal items. But as in the case of the farmer, it is seen by him as no great sacrifice even though he has parted with everything.

These parables point out the power of desire. The primary factor in both parables is not the act of selling everything, but the energizing motive behind that radical act. Imagine you see a mother look into the swimming pool located in the backyard of her house. She sees something there that causes her to drop everything, rush out of her house so quickly that she breaks the screen door on her back porch. She then jumps into the pool with all her clothes on and with her new iPhone in the back pocket of her pants. That is not normal behavior for anyone. What would motivate such irrational behavior? This mother had seen that her two-year old had somehow gotten past all the barriers guarding her swimming pool and had just fallen into the pool. Desire to save this precious life overwhelmed all else, leading her to do things that she would not normally have done and to count them as of no consequence in light of the overwhelming value of her precious child.

These two parables reveal something very important. They speak of the gospel order in the changes needed in our lives. Both of these men make big changes in their lives. Big changes are needed in all of our lives too, but they don't come simply by setting about to make changes. You can't simply write on your daily "to-do" list an item like, "Give up trying to control people and situations today," and then expect it to happen merely by trying to do so. To stop trying to control people will require something about as radical as selling all your possessions. It will require a complete surrender of oneself to God and his rule of our lives. If you want to change (and change we all must), it will require the joyful discovery of the treasure that Jesus is.

The gospel order is joyful discovery followed by the selling of all, the complete surrender to God. We speak of this theologically by saying that the

indicative must precede the imperative. Those are both moods of Greek verbs, the indicative referring to statements of fact and the imperative to commands. We must receive the facts about Jesus first before we will be able to receive and obey his commands. Joy comes before sacrifice, discovery before decisions. The application is to work every day to fill your heart with joy in Jesus and the treasure he is. God promises that those who seek God will find him. Seek joy in Jesus. Be filled with gratitude for all you have in him. Read the Bible in order to receive first. Read the commands of the Bible as promises of what God is doing in your life.

Let's do some of this before moving on, calling to mind what a great treasure we have in Jesus. We can see something of this in the next parable, the parable of the nets. It is a simple parable, and it makes the same point that was made in the parable of the weeds. A net is thrown into the sea and it gathers all kinds of fish. When the fishermen arrive on shore, they must separate the fish. Jews were under the dietary laws of the Old Testament, which rendered some fish unclean to them. Presumably, these fishermen are dividing the clean from the unclean. Jesus says that it will be the same at the close of the age. There will be a division made, with the evil being cast into the fiery furnace.

Jesus didn't have the reluctance to speak of hell that is so common today. He spoke of it as a **"fiery furnace,"** a place where **"there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"** (v. 50). Listen to these words from John Bunyan as he describes the horrors of hell.

[In hell] thou shalt have none but a company of damned souls with an innumerable company of devils to keep company with thee. While thou art in this world, the very thought of the devil's appearing to thee makes thy flesh to tremble and thine hair ready to stand upright on thy head. But oh, what wilt thou do when not only the supposition of the devil's appearing but the real society of all the devils of hell will be with thee—howling, roaring and screeching in such a hideous manner that thou wilt be even at thy wit's end and ready to run stark mad again for anguish and torment. If after ten thousand years, an end should come, there would be comfort. But here is thy misery: here thou must be forever. When thou seest what an innumerable company of howling devils thou art amongst, thou shalt think this again—this is my portion forever. When thou hast been in hell so many thousand years as there are stars in the firmament or drops in the sea or sands on the seashore, yet thou hast to lie there forever. Oh, this one word—ever—how will it torment thy soul.

One of the things to treasure in Jesus is that he provides forgiveness, which allows us to escape the condemnation Jesus warns of here. There is no other escape possible than that provided by Jesus. These are not the words of some self-centered preacher who only wants to motivate people to do what he wants them to do. This is a warning from the great Judge of all mankind, our Lord Jesus.

Jesus is precious not only for the escape he provides from future condemnation, but also in the benefits he provides in the present. Let me mention just one of them. He provides us with the gift of deliverance from shame, particularly the shame of feeling that we just don't measure up. Do you ever feel that way? I have noticed over the years that most church members feel themselves inadequate when they compare themselves to other Christians in the church. Everyone feels like most others in the church are more spiritual. In short, everyone feels inadequate. I can identify, because I often feel that way around other pastors. There's an interesting verse about this in Revelation 13:18. It says, **"This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666."** In the Bible, the number "7" is the number of God, which makes it the number of perfection. Man comes up short of that by one. In other words, we feel inadequate because we are inadequate. But our precious Jesus gives us his righteousness. We no longer need to feel shame when we compare ourselves to others and come up short. We no longer even need to compare ourselves to others. **"You are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption"** (1 Cor. 1:30). This is the treasure we have in Jesus and he is worth losing everything else to have.

II. Receiving the Kingdom by Faith

The last parable of the chapter is the most curious. **"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"** (v. 52). I agree with Calvin, who says that the old things are the familiar Scriptures and the new things are the relevant applications of Scripture. I think what Jesus is talking about here is an experience I've had many times in which I read a familiar passage of Scripture but find it new and fresh in its application to my life. The Bible works this way because it is alive. It is God himself who is the master of the house, bringing out both these old and new things from his word. We receive the kingdom by receiving these old and new things from his hand.

The chapter ends with a negative example, an example of unbelief. Jesus was teaching in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth and everyone was astonished at his wisdom and his mighty works. But then they began to have second thoughts about him. **"Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us?... And they took offense at him"** (v. 55-57).

I see two reasons here for their unbelieving response, and these two reasons are still present today. First, Jesus' family made him offensive to the people of Nazareth. Sadly, it is still Jesus' family, the Church, that often makes him offensive to people. If you are looking for a reason not to believe in Jesus, the Church is an easy excuse. How many times have you heard people say that they can't believe in Jesus because the church is so full of hypocrites? That may be, but it is better to look at Jesus and not let yourself be turned away by his flawed followers. If Jesus is truly a treasure, then don't miss out on this treasure by the behavior of others.

A second reason for their unbelieving response was the everyday nature of Jesus to his fellow citizens in Nazareth. They seemed to assume that God would not work in the everyday things of life. If something is common, then God is not in it. I wonder if we miss Jesus for the same reason. What if everything that happens is full of meaning, full of a call to trust Jesus? What we need are eyes to see these things.

CONCLUSION:

For many years, George Beverly Shea was the songleader at Billy Graham's evangelistic crusades. His trademark song was "I'd Rather Have Jesus." The lyrics of that song are an appropriate summary of this passage. "I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold; I'd rather be His than have riches untold; I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands; I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hand Than to be the king of a vast domain Or be held in sin's dread sway; I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today."

American hymnals often list Rhea Miller as the author of this song, but that is in dispute. Many list the author as Prince Oscar of Sweden. His is an interesting story. He was the second son of King Oscar II and second in the line of succession to the throne. But he fell in love with a commoner named Ebba Munck, a lady in waiting of the Crown Princess. Ebba was a devout Christian and Prince Oscar was greatly influenced by her. He decided to marry her, which required that he relinquish his royal title of prince and his right of succession. The two of them became active in many Christian endeavors, including the founding of a missionary society. Prince Oscar had come upon the priceless treasure and joyfully gave up all to have Him. What about you?