

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Clusters of Parables: Matthew 13:44-58

### Introduction

As seen in a previous talk, there are seven parables of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13. The term “the Kingdom of Heaven” or, more literally, “the Kingdom of the Heavens” is regularly used by Matthew while the other gospels use the term “the Kingdom of God”. Some Bible teachers believe that they mean the same thing and that Matthew only uses the term to avoid offending the Jewish audience who were not to speak the name of God. While this sounds feasible, it does not explain why Matthew uses both terms in 19:23-24: “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” Also, the term “the kingdom of God” is used in the following references of Matthew: 6:33; 12:28; 21:31 and 21:43.

In this Gospel of the King, Matthew uses language that distinguishes the two. Hence, when we consider the kingdom of God, we see the total sphere of God’s sovereign rule. When we see the kingdom of the heavens, we find a rule of God limited (or delegated) to the heavens. Well might we say, the kingdom of the heavens is included *in* the all-embracing kingdom of God; but the kingdom of the heavens *cannot* include the whole kingdom of God. Hence, we can see how the two may be used interchangeably in the scriptures.

The seven parables may be divided up into four and three. The first group was spoken to the crowds on the seashore and included:

1. The sower and the seed
2. The wheat and the tares
3. The mustard seed, and
4. The hidden leaven

In each of these parables, there is failure and the rule of the heavens falls upon both true and pretend believers. This is particularly seen in the last three which relate to Christendom as a whole, but the Parable of the Sower speaks specifically of reception of God’s word by individuals. Despite this, we must remember that the Lord Jesus Himself explained the meaning of the first two of these parables to His own disciples giving us a key whereby we may rightly interpret the others.

The next three, which we will consider today, were told privately to His disciples “in the house”. They are found in verses 44-58 and include:

1. The treasure hid in the field
2. The pearl of great price, and
3. The dragnet

### The Treasure Hid in a Field

The Lord Jesus said, “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.”

The “field” in the parables of Jesus represents this world. Can an ordinary man buy the world? The answer is “No!” Can a man buy salvation? “No!” A man can only be saved by grace. So how are we to interpret this parable? In Mark 4:13, in relation to the interpretation of the Parable of the Sower, Jesus said, “Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?” Hence, we emphasise that Jesus’ own interpretation of the parable of the Sower gives us the key to the symbolism found in the others. So, by comparing scripture with scripture. Let us consider:

- The field;
- The identity of the treasure;
- The man who found the treasure; and

- The cost to that man;

**What is the field?** We find the answer given in Matthew 13:38: “The field is the world.”

**What is the treasure?** The answer to this question is found in Exodus 19:5-6: “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a *peculiar treasure* unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.”

Again, in Psalm 135:4 we read: “For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure.”

Furthermore, in Malachi 3:17 we find: “And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my *jewels*...” The word for “jewels” here is the same as the word for “peculiar treasure” in the previous verses. It refers to those of Israel who both feared the LORD and spoke often one to another about Him.

There again, in Deuteronomy 7:6-8 we find: “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you...”

**How did Israel, this treasure, become hidden in the field of this world?**

Deuteronomy 4:1 gives us a promise to God’s chosen people: “Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you.” The chapter then continues and states what would happen if the nation disobeyed: “And the LORD shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the LORD shall lead you” (Deuteronomy 4:27). This is confirmed by Deuteronomy 28:64: “And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone.”

At the end of the reign of Solomon, Israel was divided into a section of ten tribes in the north and Judah and Benjamin in the south. Because of idolatrous practice, the ten tribes went into captivity under the Assyrians. From this there was no return. Later, Judah was taken into captivity by the Babylonians. There was, after seventy years, a partial return to the Promised Land. However, most of Israel is scattered among the Gentile nations to this very day. The time is coming, when they will, under great trial and persecution, return to their God-given land. So Israel was found by the LORD and chosen as His people. However, He has, in judgment on the one hand, yet for the nation’s preservation on the other, hidden him among the nations of the world. At the moment, the faithful of Israel remain the treasure of God hidden in this world.

**Who is this man?**

He is someone who knows where the treasure is. Only God knows that. This person is therefore, God and man. He alone has the means to buy the world. Therefore, he must represent the Son of the living God, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Note also that it was the joy he had in finding the treasure that prompted him to buy the field. We recall in Zephaniah 3:17 the LORD speaks to Zion (the faithful remnant of Israel) in this way, “The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.” So it shall be, when the millennial kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ is physically set up upon this earth.

**So, what was the cost to the Lord Jesus to purchase this world?**

It was the giving of His life. The story is often told of a boy who made a model boat. While sailing it, he came to lose it. Some while later, he saw it displayed in a shop window. He went to the shopkeeper and explained what had happened and asked for it back. The shopkeeper told him he would have to pay for it. So the lad went off and earned the necessary money in a variety of ways. He returned to the shop and purchased the boat. As he left the shop, he said to the boat, “You are twice mine now. I made you and I have bought you.”

So it is with the Son of the Father’s love. He made this world (Colossians 1). The sin of man wrenched it from His grasp. Creation was fallen and under a curse. Sin separated man from God and its penalty was death. Therefore, only the death of the just One could satisfy God concerning sin. So Christ was made a curse on Golgotha’s tree in order that people could be redeemed and His creation set free. Furthermore, the devil is seen as the God of this world. He would also have to be destroyed for Christ to possess it. The Lord Jesus is the Victor, who by death, has bound the strong man, namely, the devil.

## THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL.

In this section, we will examine what is symbolised by:

- The pearl of great price;
- The merchant man; and,
- The cost.

### The Pearl of Great Price.

Pearls have always been counted among jewels known as the “queen of gems”. They come in various shapes and sizes. One of the finest was a drop-shaped pearl called the “Star of the West” and was about the size of a sparrow’s egg.

Throughout the Scriptures, pearls are regarded as very costly and precious. When we turn to Revelation 21:21, we see the gates of the holy city as twelve pearls. They mark the way of holiness. In Matthew 7:7 pearls represent holy and precious truths. In Revelation 17:4 we see them expressing beauty and riches: “The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, decked with gold and precious stones and pearls.” The woman is rebellious towards God, so the pearls cannot speak of truth or holiness here. Similarly, in Revelation 18:16, we find a godless city marked by such riches. As a result, we can see that it is more difficult to interpret the meaning of the pearl in the parable. However, we do find that *the pillar and ground of truth* is the house of God itself. It is none other than the church of the living God! This is made up of all genuine Christians, past, present and, possibly, future. Therefore, I present to you the meaning of the pearl of great price as the true church. It is a unique pearl among pearls.

Another reason for believing this is found in the nature of the pearl itself. The jewel is formed in an oyster around a point of irritation. The creature produces secretions of nacre (or mother of pearl) to surround the object causing the problem. Layer upon layer is built up. So we find that the church originated from a point of irritation and wounding, namely, the cross. For two thousand years it has been built up fulfilling the words of Christ, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

### Who is the Merchant Man and What was the Cost?

The merchant in this parable is focussed on trading for pearls only. He would obviously be a rich man. Yet, when he discovered this pearl of great price, he was prepared to sell all that he had in order to buy it. This reminds us of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is written in 2 Corinthians 8:9, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” The down-stooping grace of Christ is found also in Philippians 2 :5-8, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

From the last scripture, we find that the cost involved was the giving of His life. In Ephesians 5:25 we read, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” It is often said that when He had nothing more to give, He gave Himself. Furthermore, we know that the church is an assembly of called out ones. We read of some of these in 1 Corinthians 6:20, “For ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God’s.” All true Christians have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ and form that church.

## THE PARABLE OF THE NET CAST INTO THE SEA.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.

In this section we shall examine what is meant by:

- The fishermen, net and the sea;
- The creatures caught;
- The end of the world;

- The furnace of fire.

### **The Net and the Sea**

The net was a large fishing net that was thrown into the sea and dragged along the bottom. It was a net that did not break, but gathers of every kind found in the sea. The main objective of the fishing was to gather up the good. Only when the net was full was it retrieved. In the Bible the waters, when used symbolically, speak of the Gentile nations. For example, in Revelation 17:1 and 15 we read, "And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: ...And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." The net is therefore the gospel that goes out to the nations as God's final appeal to mankind. It is the Everlasting Gospel of Revelation 14:6-7, "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters."

When we look at the parable, the "they" who fish and then sit down to sort the catch are the same. They are identified in the section as "the angels". So these fishermen are angels – God's messengers. It is the angels who sort the good (identified as the just) from the bad (identified as the wicked). Those people who, at that time, have trusted in the God of creation are the just - for the just shall live by faith. They will pass through into the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. The action of putting them into vessels shows that they are suitable for the purposes of God. Those peoples who reject God are classed as the wicked and will be cast into a furnace of fire. This is a place marked by living torment – hence the wailing and gnashing of teeth. It has been remarked that weeping speaks of remorse and sorrow. Gnashing of teeth speaks of frustration, hostility and anger. What a condition to be in for eternity!

The "end of the world" is better translated the "end of the age" and speaks of the time of Great Tribulation that finishes with the Battle of Armageddon. Here the unbelieving nations gather in the Valley of Jezreel in order to prepare to attack Jerusalem. God steps in and they are wiped out. Only then is the Kingdom literally set up on earth.

So, in these three parables, we have travelled through time and seen God's dealings with Israel who know God as Yahweh; the church who know Him to be the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and the Gentiles who know Him as the Creator. Today, we are privileged to live in the age of the church. Are you part of it?

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