



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermons

Look What I Found!

Matthew 13.44-46

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Introduction

1. Finally, after years of dutifully placing the stamps in the right place and mailing in the forms, you won. The sweepstakes is yours! How would you feel? Who would you tell? Who would you *not* tell? What excitement would it create for you?
2. A man knocks at your door. He says that he represents a billionaire who has commissioned him to make you an offer he doesn't think you can refuse. He offers you \$10 million for all your possessions. He will allow you to keep any cherished family heirlooms that derive their value more from sentiment than tangible worth. But everything else—your home, clothes, furniture, cars, *everything* else—will be turned over to him in exchange for a cashier's check worth \$10 million. After that you can go anywhere you want, do anything you want to do. There are no strings attached. You have him and his offer checked out. It's legitimate. Do you make the exchange? How would you feel? Who would you tell? Who would you *not* tell? What excitement would it create for you?
3. The feelings you are projecting in response to those stories are the kind Jesus would have evoked with the parables that are the subject of this study.

Body

- I. The Great Treasure and a Pearl of Incalculable Value.
 - A. Let's again remember our context.
 1. In Jesus' ministry.
 - a. Although popular opinion was still generally supportive of Jesus, opposition was increasing.
 - b. Part of their questions came from the fact that Jesus was not doing what they had understood God's anointed ruler was going to do (cf. Matt 11.2-3).
 - c. If the kingdom was going to experience so much trouble—and was not going to be the great political force everyone expected—was it worth the effort to pursue it?
 2. For Matthew's readers.

- a. The circumstances would have been similar.
 - b. This kingdom had been active for several years, but opposition from the Jews had not diminished; if anything it had grown more severe (especially if you factor in the challenge of the Judaizing controversy in the early church).
 - c. Maybe it would be better to just give up, as the readers of Hebrews were considering (cf. Heb 10.38-39; et. al.).
3. It is against these backgrounds that Jesus told and Matthew recorded these parables, which are found only in this gospel.
 - a. The parables are sister parables which follow the same pattern.¹
 - 1) A reference to something very valuable.
 - 2) Finding it.
 - 3) Going.
 - 4) Selling everything.
 - 5) Buying it.
 - b. Each serves to help us focus on “the glorious character of the kingdom . . . which justifies the cost of absolute discipleship.”²
- B. Discovered treasure (Matt 13.44).
 1. The story depicts a sharecropper who discovers a treasure hidden in the field.
 2. This would not be at all unusual in that day.
 - a. There were banks, but not such as ordinary people could use.
 - b. The most cherished belongings of people were put into the ground. “There was a rabbinic saying that there was only one safe repository for money—the earth.”³
 3. The man in our story finds such a treasure, leaves it where he found it while he scrapes together all his resources, and buys the field, thus securing a treasure worth far more than all he sold.
 4. Modern readers see a problem with the man’s ethics.
 - a. Barclay cites Jewish Rabbinic law to the effect that “scattered money” was among the finds that belonged to the finder.⁴
 - b. But that may not really be a concern here. Jesus told other stories (cf. Luke 16.1-9; 18.1-8) with details that showed people with suspect character who nevertheless displayed some virtue from which disciples can learn.
 5. In this case, the intent of the story is to show the lengths to which people will go to seize an opportunity to gain something of great value.
- C. One pearl of great value.
 1. The merchant here is probably a wholesaler—the word is ἔμπορος, *emporos*, from which comes the English word, “emporium.”
 2. It was common for people in antiquity to search everywhere for great pearls, the value of which was great.

¹ See Donald A. Hagner, “Matthew’s Parables of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:1-52),” in *The Challenge of Jesus’ Parables*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 116.

² Ibid.

³ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. 2, 2nd ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1958), 93.

⁴ Ibid., 94-95.

- a. In the first century AD, merchants traveled all over the world looking for great pearls—from the Mediterranean, to the Black Sea, to the Indian Ocean.
 - b. Cleopatra is supposed to have had a pearl worth the modern equivalent of two million dollars.⁵
3. Again, some question the details of the story. Would a man really sell all he had for such a pearl?
4. Notice that Jesus did not say that he merely hoped that he might find it, but that he already had.
5. But again, the point of the analogy is to show the lengths to which people will go to seize an opportunity to have something of great value.

II. "What Shall It Profit a Man . . . ?

- A. Jesus' point was that securing a place of service in God's reign is worth any effort given to that service.
 1. He had hinted at this idea when he said that the least in the kingdom is greater than John (Matt 11.11).
 2. It also fits with his emphasis elsewhere that discipleship does in fact demand a cost (Matt 16.24-27). Too many want to straddle the fence and have the benefits of discipleship without making any kind of real (or costly) commitment.
 3. But my point here is not to browbeat anyone into service, but to emphasize that any cost is worth the return (just as giving the billionaire all you own in exchange for \$10 million is worth the return).
 - a. That was Paul's view (Phil 3.7-11), the basis for his attitude of contentment no matter what his circumstances (Phil 4.10-13).
 - b. But Paul understood what many in today's secular, materialistic world do not: the truly lasting treasures are not found in physical possessions (cf. Matt 6.19-24).
- B. But there is another side to these analogies that we must consider: the sheer joy of being in the kingdom.
 1. "It is suggestive to find the Kingdom of Heaven compared to a pearl. To the ancient peoples, . . . a pearl was the loveliest of all possessions, a joy to contemplate and to admire. That means that the Kingdom of Heaven is the loveliest thing in the world. Let us remember what the Kingdom is. To be in the Kingdom is to accept and to do the will of God. That is to say, to do the will of God is no grim, gray, agonizing thing; it is a lovely thing. Beyond the discipline, beyond the sacrifice, beyond the self-denial, beyond the cross, there lies the supreme loveliness which is nowhere else. There is only one way to bring peace to the heart, joy to the mind, beauty to the life, and that is to accept and to do the will of God."⁶
 2. It is obvious that maintaining such an attitude will help us serve with greater exuberance.
 3. Therefore, we should think often about the treasure in the field and pearl of great price.

⁵ C. Michael Moss, *When God Reigns: A Study in the Parables of Jesus* (Webb City, MO: Covenant Publishers, 2004), 61.

⁶ Barclay, 97.

Conclusion

1. The story is told of a Rabbi Jochanan who “was going up from Tiberias to Sepphoris, and was leaning on the shoulder of Rabbi Chijjah ben Abbah. They came to a field plot and he said, ‘This used to belong to me, but I sold it that I might study the Law.’ They came to a field of olives, and he said, ‘This used to belong to me, but I sold it that I might study the Law.’ Rabbi Chijjah ben Abbah began to weep. When asked why, he said, “‘I weep because you have nothing for your old age.’ Rabbi Jochanan answered, ‘Chijjah, my son, is it a small thing in your eyes that I sold something that was created in six days that I might gain that which was given in forty days and forty nights?’”⁷
2. What will it profit you to have gained the whole world, to have lived well in your old age, and to have never realized the joys of service in the kingdom?

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⁷ Moss, 62.