

## **Buried Treasure & the Precious Pearl, two Double Sided Parables Matt 13:44-45**

Children often fantasize that in some field or old barn they will discover a treasure that has escaped everyone's attention. In our sophisticated society, many would call this unrealistic; we think such things do not happen anymore.

Yet from time to time treasures have been discovered just by stumbling over them, such as a Shepherd boy near the Dead Sea who found 2000 year old scrolls hidden in a cave; or the farmer plowing his field in Suffolk, England, who struck a container that held beautiful silver dishes dating from the Roman times.

But there are also people like the famous treasure hunter, Mel Fisher, who dedicate their entire lives to such quests. Fisher searched the Florida Keys for several decades before finding the sunken ship Atocha with its treasure trove of Spanish gold.

More recently, in 2010 millionaire Forrest Fenn purposely hid a treasure in the Colorado Rockies hoping to encourage more people to get out doors and go exploring. It is estimated that in the ten years before the treasure was found, at least 250,000 people went looking for that stash; four of them lost their lives in the process.

Both those who stumble upon and those who dedicate their entire lives, have something in common with the next two of Jesus' "kingdom parables;" about people finding treasure.

In Matthew 13, Jesus only explained three of the seven "Kingdom of Heaven" parables He told, leaving the others for serious seekers to attempt teasing out their meaning

The first two parables about the sower and the seed, along with the weedy wheat field, at least help us decipher the next two concerning a mustard plant and leaven hidden in the dough, since all four appear to describe various ways in which the devil attacks or imitates the Kingdom of Heaven.

But these next parables, of the buried treasure and precious pearl, which Jesus shared only with His disciples, are very tricky to get any certain meaning out of. While His disciples claimed to have understood them, these two parables have left commentators scratching their heads ever since.

At first glance the parable of the buried treasure and the precious pearl seem to be telling the same story from a slightly different perspective, but the deeper you look into them the more confusing they get. The problem being that while we assume that the treasure and the pearl both symbolize some aspect of "the Kingdom of Heaven," what is that? And who do the accidental discoverer and the dedicated seeker represent? Depending upon your answer – whether it is Jesus or us, being either the treasure or the finder – greatly changes the meaning of these parables.

So the best I can do today is give you both interpretations of each parable in the hopes that one or more of these answers rings true for your current life. This is one of those times when I am depending greatly upon the work of God's indwelling Holy Spirit to help us discover the message Jesus left hidden here for us.

Let's take the Buried treasure first.

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

Matthew 13:44

In this parable a treasure has been hidden in a field. Who put it there and how long ago are questions that cannot be answered. But we do know that ancient Palestine, was frequently ravaged by war and since there was no such thing as a savings bank back then, people often hid their accumulated wealth in a field rather than in the house; in a house, thieves could easily find it; in a field, the treasure would be much safer.

But if the owner was then killed during a war, he would carry his secret with him to the grave; no one would ever know where he had hidden his treasure. Since Jesus told another parable about a fearful servant burying money in the ground, perhaps over the years, the fields of Palestine might have become a veritable treasure house.

The man in this parable may have been a hired hand or renter. He may have been plowing the field, digging a ditch, or planting a tree. Whatever the case, he accidentally found a hidden treasure. We are not told what the treasure was, but that it was of such great worth that he gladly sold everything he had in order to buy the field and claim this treasure as his own.

Now, to some people reading this parable, the man, finding the treasure and then buying the field to claim it, seems to be dishonest. Some might say that the honest thing to do would be to tell the owner of the field about the treasure, ..... since it was on his property and rightfully belonged to him. Right? Well Not necessarily.

Jewish rabbinic law states: "*If a person finds scattered fruit or money, it belongs to the finder.*" So the disciples hearing this parable would not have thought the finder's actions were in any way unethical.

It is obvious that the treasure did not belong to the person who currently owned the field, because, if it did, then they would have dug up the treasure before selling the piece of land. So, really, the man who found the treasure was being both honest and

generous. Because he did not have to buy the field, he could have just taken the treasure. Or he could have used a portion of the treasure to provide enough money to make the purchase. But he did neither. Instead, according to the story, he liquidated everything he owned in order to come up with the money needed to buy the field. The seller of the field got a fair price and the finder got both the whole field along with this priceless treasure.

But we need to be careful not to lose sight of the main point of the parable which is: **this person found something so valuable that he gladly gave everything he had .... (everything!) ...to get it.**

In a similar way the next story has a pearl merchant selling everything he owns in order to purchase a single pearl of priceless value.

the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it." Matthew 13:45

By itself, this story seems a close parallel to the earlier one of the man who found a treasure. Having found it – their treasure – both men literally sell all that they have in order to obtain it.

But here is where the stories part. The buried treasure was found by accident, the pearl was found as the result of a lifelong dedicated quest. Since the treasure and the pearl in some way represent the Kingdom of Heaven as it exists here on the earth – which is what the other kingdom parables are about – **what or who is that treasure and who then do these two men represent?**

**Early Church fathers, Irenaeus and Augustine both identified the treasure and the pearl as being Christ and us humans as being the lucky finders.** While that makes some sense; does not a new convert to Christ often say: "*I have found Christ.*" And, didn't the Apostle Paul say something similar, when he declared that he counted everything else he had ever achieved as a complete loss compared to "*the surpassing value*" to gaining Christ and being found in Him? Philippians 3:8-9

Yes, it may seem like we did find Christ. But, the Truth is that sinners cannot "find Christ" for we are blind and stubborn. As Paul wrote in his letter to the Roman Church,

*"There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God."*  
Romans 3:10

So we were not seeking, but, if the found treasure were Jesus Christ, what do we possess that we could

sell in order to buy for ourselves: Jesus and by implication the Salvation He offers.

Again our Bible is very clear, not only were we not looking, neither do we possess anything sufficient in our life to buy our salvation, which He has already freely offered us for the asking.

The wages of sin is Death. But the FREE gift of God Is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord <small>Romans 6:23</small>
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Thus, it was not us, but Jesus who came searching for some hidden treasure, some precious pearl; as He said, *the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost* Luke 19:10

And it was Christ Jesus who literally gave everything He had to acquire us this treasure – which I think is us. (Ephesians 5:25) So this parable probably is not talking about us seeking until we find Jesus; and having found Him, possessing anything with which to purchase Him. Remember, Paul didn't say that he counted everything a loss in order to find Jesus, but to be *found in Jesus*.

So even though – as believers – we are told to *seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness* Matt.6:33, this parable is probably not about us as pre-Christians either looking for, or having anything that we could give to purchase our entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. This was the misunderstanding of the rich young ruler, who thought that he could buy his way into Heaven. When told that he could only find his way into God's kingdom by selling all that he had and coming to follow Jesus, he turned sadly away. Had he taken the advice and followed, he would have found that Jesus was freely offering what he so desperately wanted, but instead he trusted in his own wealth more than he loved his relationship with God. Matthew 19:16-22

But perhaps, we can draw this much of a personal lesson from these treasure and pearl parables. Whether seeking or not, when we find that Christ has found us, we should recognize in this relationship something so priceless that we would have been willing to sell everything we had to acquire it... had it not already been freely given to us.

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So then let's look at these two parables from the other side. Perhaps it is about Jesus looking to acquire us, the citizens of the Kingdom of God, as His hidden treasure, His priceless pearl. At least Jesus, and only Jesus, matches the description of that person who willingly gave everything in order to acquire this treasure.

you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor,  
so that by his poverty you might become rich.

2 Corinthians 8:9

But now the parable trips over itself by indicating that while the buried treasure was found by accident, the pearl was diligently sought after. If the buried treasure is us, then, in the sense that God has always known where we are at any given moment, how could we ever be lost? Again the Bible clearly teaches that God has not only followed each of us intimately from our inception in our mother's womb, He has always known those who were His own from the very beginning of time!

He chose us in Christ before the foundation  
of the world to be holy and blameless  
before Him in love.

Ephesians 1:4

And while Jesus did give away everything of His former self to seek us and in finding us, gave everything else He had to purchase us, it's not like He didn't know where we were all along. As Jesus said,

My sheep hear my voice.  
I know them, and they follow me.

John 10:27-28

*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand.* John 10:27-28

In closing, what can we learn from these two parables, even if we are still uncertain of what they are saying about the Kingdom of Heaven. While the disciples said they understood, I think that at this point they really did not even know what they did not know; they were just trying to get out of class before Jesus could a pop quiz.

So what might these parables teach us about Jesus?

Though He knew who and where we were, He also knew that our sins had made us "lost" to God. So Jesus came seeking us, like some buried treasure or a precious pearl, and when He found us, He gladly gave everything He had to purchase us back from the devil's kingdom, now claiming us as His own.

You know that you were ransomed  
from [your]the futile ways, not with  
perishable things like silver or gold,  
but with the precious blood of Christ,

1 Peter 1:18-19

And what might this parable also teach us about now being found by Christ?

That it is more precious than everything we have ever had to be “found” and now living where we are, as we are, in the Kingdom of Heaven. This realization of our precious relationship with Christ Jesus, should then cause us to willingly offering back to God everything that we are, in gratitude for what He has given us, thus proving that His will has always been *good and acceptable and perfect*. Romans 12:1-2