

THE KINGDOM PARABLES: PART 2

MATTHEW 13:44-52

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Last week, we began a study on the parables recorded in the thirteenth chapter of MATTHEW. These are parables that teach us about the Kingdom of God. When we talk about the Kingdom of God, we are really talking about the church. So, when we study these parables, we are actually studying the nature of the church.

Last week, we looked at the first four parables recorded in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, and we discovered that the picture painted in those four parables is rather negative. The Kingdom of God as viewed with the naked eye is anything but perfect. Many of the people who attend church, for one reason or another have lost their witness. Some people never had a witness in the first place. Churches tend to use worldly standards to measure success, and the immoral mindset of the world often has a greater influence on the church than the church is able to have on the world. These are the negative things we see happening in the first four parables.

When I have presented this picture to other people in the past, I have discovered that the average person understands perfectly what I am talking about. Christians and non-Christians alike have observed these things to be true about the church.

For this reason, I think it is a mistake to pretend that problems do not exist. It is better to face the problems and then think about what we can do in a positive way to confront the problems. People who admit that they are not perfect are people who will constantly work to become better than what they are. It is the people who do not want to admit that they have problems who will never improve.

So, we first need to admit the reality that things are not what they should be, and things will never be perfect until Christ returns again. Second, even though we will never make things perfect, we must never give up working toward renewal. Here at CCCNJ, we are discovering that issues discussed years ago now have to be addressed again by the governing boards of this church, because some of the solutions proposed years ago are no longer working today. We will always have problems, and we will always have to work toward bringing about renewal. Until the day when Christ returns, there will be a constant need for personal spiritual renewal and structural renewal within the Church.

So, we must admit that we have problems, and we must constantly be working to bring about renewal in the church. And then, we need to do something else; namely, we need to look at the Church through the eyes of faith. And, my main goal today is to help us to do just that.

When we look at the church with the naked eye, we see buildings and activity and organization and people. But, when we look at the Church through the eyes of faith, we see two things. First, we see Jesus Christ. Second, we see Christ's mysterious work of grace in the hearts of people. In MATTHEW 13:44-50, Jesus uses three parables to help us see the Kingdom of God through the eyes of faith. Let's take a look at the first one as it is recorded in verse 44. There we read, "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 the field."

In this parable, we see two symbols already used in previous parables. In earlier parables, the field represented the world. It has the same meaning here. In previous parables, whenever we saw a man going into the field, that man represented the Son of Man, who is Jesus Christ. Here, it has the same meaning. Jesus does not arbitrarily change the meaning of these symbols.

So, we already know the meaning of two symbols, and that helps us a great deal. But, there is another symbol used here that is not found in previous parables, nor is it explained here. The word I refer to is "treasure."

I have heard it said that, in this parable, treasure represents Christ or the great salvation that Christ has to offer, the idea being that we must make a great sacrifice in order to obtain salvation.

But, this kind of explanation is in conflict with other Scripture. There is nothing we can do to obtain salvation. Our salvation does not come as a result of great sacrifice made on our part; rather, it comes as a result of great sacrifice made on the part of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

So, if the treasure doesn't represent Christ or salvation, then what does it represent? Verse 44 says that it was hidden, and then it was found, and then it was hidden again. Upon this earth there was hidden treasure. Jesus came and found that treasure. Afterwards, He hid it again.

This is a parable about the kingdom of God. In the past, men have searched in vain for the kingdom of God. They have searched in vain for a person or a group of people to whom they could point and say, "There it is! There goes the kingdom of God. There goes the one, or the group about whom we can say, 'they are in total subjection to the King of heaven.'" The search is in vain because not one person, not even one person, can be found who is in total, perfect submission to the authority of the King of heaven. Therefore, the true kingdom of God is only a theory—until one day, God became a man and lived upon this earth. During those years He lived upon this earth, everything Jesus said and did was a perfect expression of One who was in total submission to the King of heaven. The perfect and true kingdom of God found its expression in the person of Jesus Christ.

Prior to the advent of Jesus Christ and after His ascension into heaven, no perfect expression of the kingdom of God is visible with the naked eye. It is hidden. But, for the 33 years that Christ walked this earth, that which was hidden was brought out in the open for all mankind to see with their own eyes. Now, it is hidden again from the naked eye.

But, that's not the end of the story. The last sentence of the parable tells us that the one who found the treasure went and bought the field; moreover, He sacrificed everything had, even His own life, in order to purchase the field. And why? Because He knew that the only possible way for Him to establish His kingdom upon this earth was to sacrifice Himself to purchase the earth.

Please notice that the sacrifice was for the whole world. Through His sacrifice, Christ created the potential for every person on the face of this earth to become a part of the kingdom of heaven.

But, how do people become a part of the kingdom of God? How is the potential that Christ created through His great sacrifice realized in the hearts and lives of people?

From the parable recorded in verses 45 and 46, we see that it is not an automatic thing; rather, it is a step-by-step process. People do not, in an instant, become totally subject to the rule of the King of heaven.

Please look at verses 45 and 46. They read, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

Here again, we see the figure of a man, this time a merchant. In previous parables, the man who appears always represents Christ. The same is true here. In the last parable, we saw Christ sacrificing everything. Here, we see again that He is sacrificing everything. But previously, the sacrifice was made to purchase the field. Here, we see it is made in order to purchase a pearl. So, what does the pearl represent?

A pearl is a very special symbol, because of all the precious gems, only a pearl is produced from a living organism. The pearl has its beginning when something that has no value and no life enters into a living organism and causes hurt and pain to that organism. A grain of sand enters in and does harm to a living organism.

But, that is only the beginning of the story. The best part of the story is the way in which the living organism responds to the hurt. It does so by producing a white substance called the mother of pearl. And, it uses this substance to coat the outside of the grain of sand. Layer after layer, over a long period of time, the grain of sand is coated until it becomes a precious pearl.

And so, we see the response of the living organism, one who has life responding to the hurt received by something that has no value. And then, little by little, that which has no value becomes something of great value.

In the time of Christ, ordinary people did not wear the most valuable pearls; rather, they were reserved for the

king. Only the king was worthy to wear the pearls of great value. And so, we can pretty well guess that the reason why the merchant in this parable bought the pearl of great value was to present it to the king. He sacrificed everything to purchase the pearl so the king could be glorified.

Christ's sacrifice on the cross was not only made to give all people a chance to enter into the kingdom of God. It was also made with the expressed purpose of helping those who make the decision to enter—step by step—to become a holy people, a people of great value who will bring glory to the King of heaven. EPHESIANS 5:26 says that "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

We bring nothing of value to the cross of Christ. But, Christ looks beyond our wretched condition. He sees the potential of what we can become through His grace. And so, He receives us, allowing us to hurt Him, our very sins causing Him to be nailed to a cross. But through death, He conquers death. And through the pain of hell itself, He defeats the power of hell. And, He takes us whose sin caused Him such pain, and then using His own blood, little by little and step by step, He forms us into precious pearls.

Through the mysterious work of grace in the hearts of His chosen people, the King of heaven receives the glory He deserves.

This is the Church that we see through the eyes of faith. It goes far beyond buildings and programs and activity and large numbers of people. It is a view of Christ Himself and His work of grace in the lives of people.

We must use eyes of faith to see the church from this perspective. Only those who have faith in God can look at the church from this point of view. When Jesus spoke these last three parables, He did not speak to the crowds. He took His disciples aside and spoke to them alone. He knew that the crowds did not have the ability to view the Kingdom of God from this viewpoint. In fact, in all probability, the disciples themselves did not understand these parables at the time they heard them. But, they had the faith needed to understand, and I think that understanding did come in time.

The Kingdom of God, as viewed through the eyes of faith, can be seen from past, present, and future perspectives. The past perspective is a view of the only perfect human being who ever lived sacrificing Himself to make it possible for everyone in the world to become members of His Kingdom. The present perspective is a view of the grace of Jesus Christ working in the hearts of those who have chosen and have been chosen to enter the Kingdom of God. And the future perspective is one where the Kingdom of God as seen with the naked eye and the Kingdom of God as seen through the eyes of faith merge into one.

In the parable of the net, recorded in verses 47-50, I am reminded that it won't be long before all the imperfect things that we seen with the naked eye now will come to an end. Church buildings and Bylaws and traditions and programs all will come to an end. At the end of this age, angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous. At that time, all the things that can be seen with the naked eye in which men take pride will come to an end. All that will remain will be the work of God's grace in the hearts and lives of His people. Not even the forces of hell can prevail against that.

At the end of the age, what we can now only see through the eyes of faith, we will finally see with our own eyes. We will meet our Savior face to face. We will see clearly how our Lord's grace has shaped people into precious pearls of great value. In the future, we will see it with our own eyes.

Until that day, we must use the eyes of faith to see Jesus and His work of grace in the lives of people who call themselves children of God. Those who are filled with the Holy Spirit do have the ability to see the wonderful grace of Jesus at work in the lives of other people. They can look beyond the problems of the church, and they can see God at work. Through the eyes of faith, they can actually see Jesus.

Do you understand what I am trying to say in this sermon? Do you understand the meaning of these parables? That's the question that Jesus is asking us. If our answer is yes, then He has one more parable to tell us. It is the parable of a teacher of the law, or more commonly referred to as a scribe. That little parable is found in verse 52 of MATTHEW 13. In order to understand that parable, we must understand the role of a true scribe. The true scribe

is one who is able to take old truth and teach it in a new way so the people of his generation can understand.

And, dear brothers and sisters, our generation desperately needs to understand the truth conveyed in all of these parables. There are too many people leaving the church, because they have seen the problems of the church. People are looking for the answers to their questions in buildings and programs and Bylaws and traditions and people. But, they will never find answers in those places. They need to look at Jesus and His work of grace in the lives of people. So let's think about these parables. Let's experience the truth of these parables in our lives. And then, let's reach into our own storerooms of knowledge and experience and bring the old truth out in the open in a fresh and new way. Teach it so that others may also benefit from it. As scribes of our own generation, we are obliged to do this. May God help us.