

The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Costly Pearl
A Series on the Mysterious Nature of God's Kingdom: Part 7

1. What do you observe about the simile of the Parable of the Hidden Treasure (Matt 13:44)?

The simile Jesus employs here compares the kingdom of heaven to the situation of *treasure hidden in a field*. Because it is comparison of two unequal things, it can be mistaken as a simple comparison to treasure alone. To agrarian Jews, the field provides the context that the treasure is a chance and unexpected find but its value is instantly recognizable.

It is well known that first century Romans have buried their valuables in clay pots in the ground.

Under rabbinic law, if a laborer discovered buried treasure and lifted it out, the find would belong to the owner of the land who is typically a Roman citizen. In this parable, the finder does not lift the buried treasure out until he owns the land!

Yet Jesus is not concerned about the morality of the laborer, He is focused on the laborer's joy of discovery and subsequent action to acquire the land.

2. What is the meaning of the parable?

In His comparison of the kingdom of heaven as a treasure hidden in a field that is discovered by a man and hidden again, Jesus is emphasizing the desirable worth of the kingdom of heaven.

In His description of the laborer who is joyful of the find and sells all that he has to buy the land, Jesus is placing a context to the value of the kingdom of heaven; no earthly possession is worth more.

3. What do you observe about the Parable of the Costly Pearl (Matt 13:45-46)? How do your observations contrast with the Parable of the Hidden Treasure?

Jesus begins the parable with the word "again," which connects this parable with the preceding Parable of the Hidden Treasure.

Jesus employs a simile and compares the kingdom of heaven to something dissimilar. It is worthwhile to note that Greek grammar and syntax along with its underlying Aramaic (the language that Jesus would have likely spoken) renders the phrase "the kingdom of heaven is like" as "it is the case of the kingdom of Heaven as with." With this linguistic context, Jesus' point of comparison is with the costly pearl not the merchant.

In contrast to the laborer who accidentally discovers the hidden treasure, this parable is about a knowledgeable merchant looking for fine pearls in the market place and succeeds in finding one.

Produced in the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, pearls were highly valued in the first century. Jesus figuratively spoke of pearls in a reference to wise thoughts (Matt 7:6).

Both laborer and merchant recognize the worth of their valuable object, and both sell everything to purchase it.

In contrast to the laborer who paid less than the true value of the hidden treasure, the merchant paid the market price for the pearl.

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4. What does the Parable of the Costly Pearl mean and why did Jesus pair it with the Parable of the Hidden Treasure?

The Parable of the Costly Pearl emphasizes the supreme value of the kingdom of heaven. The merchant intentionally seeks the best, and when he finds it, he sells all earthly possessions, even to the point of being destitute, to have it.

There are two reasons why Jesus pairs both parables together.

1. The pairing repeats the **personal** value of the kingdom of heaven.

The first century Jew anticipated the return of the Davidic dynasty as a theocracy. They were waiting for the promised human savior who would bring spiritual renewal and political freedom; without their messiah, there was no kingdom that the individual Jew could be a part of. The kingdom was seen as a nation with a military that defended fixed borders.

2. The pairing **juxtaposes** two different types of people.

In the Parable of the Hidden Treasure, a man accidentally discovers something valuable. In the Parable of Costly Pearl, the man is searching for something valuable. In like manner, one may hear of the Good News when he least expects it or when he might be searching for the truth amidst the marketplace of ideas.

While the juxtaposition contrasts how they come about their treasure, it stresses what they have in common. They had the ability of spiritually discerning what was truly valuable.

To have some level of spiritual discernment, one must have some sense of spiritual bankruptcy (poor in spirit) or a sense that salvation cannot be achieved (futility of accomplishment).

In a subtle manner the pairing of the parables points to genuine biblical faith, a belief in the truth about ourselves (our spiritual depravity) and the fact that Jesus Christ is who He says He is and that He did what He said He'd do.

References:

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3. Keener CS, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

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