

The Parables:

According to the Greek and Hebrew definitions, a parable is "a placing of one thing beside another, an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, sentences with ethical wisdom and a comparison of one thing to another." God uses parables to teach those who are truly interested in following after Him. It is my prayer that you will be blessed by these truths.

Treasure and Pearls



By Mary Kane

The Crown Jewels of England...the Great Pyramid...the Hope Diamond...the Mona Lisa...the Declaration of Independence, all of these items are priceless treasures, admired and appreciated by people all over the world. We all have items that we treasure. How about you?

If you had a fire in your home tonight and only had time to grab two items, what would you take (assume that your family and loved ones are safe)?

I'm willing to bet that most of you did not list your TV or treadmill! Most likely the items you noted above are things that would only be valuable you, not to the world at large. I would take our family pictures and the box of special mementos of my two sons that I have collected as they have grown up; funny little cards, letters, pictures, baby shoes, precious little-boy gifts, sports programs and graduation announcements. How I treasure these items!

God's Word has a few things to say about what we should treasure. Please spend a few moments in prayer with the Lord, asking for His forgiveness and guidance before we open the Scriptures.

Now, please read Matthew 14:44-46.

What subject is being discussed in these verses?

The *kingdom of heaven* and the *kingdom of God* are used interchangeably throughout the gospels. The *kingdom of heaven* is cited by James Stalker as being equivalent to "the will of God... and by prayer and effort the kingdom of heaven is being translated to earth."ⁱⁱ So we can judge how much of the kingdom of heaven we have in our lives by how closely we are following the will of God.

The *kingdom of heaven* was the original plan for planet earth before the fall in the Garden of Eden. Matthew Henry stated that the *kingdom of heaven* is "...the gospel dispensation of the covenant of grace, the opening of the kingdom of heaven to all believers, by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a *kingdom* of which Christ is the Sovereign, and we must be the willing, loyal subjects of it. It is a kingdom of *heaven*, not of this world, a spiritual kingdom: its original from heaven, its tendency to heaven."

To what two valuable items is the kingdom of heaven being compared to in these verses?

What did the man do in order to gain the kingdom of heaven?

He sold everything that he had in order to gain the kingdom of heaven; his house, his furnishings, his possessions and his land. The kingdom of heaven was much more valuable to him than anything he had previously owned. Everything was expendable. Nothing else mattered. How quickly he gave up all that he possessed in order to gain the kingdom of heaven.

Please turn the book of Philippians and read 3:8-9.

How did Paul count all the things that he valued before he came to know Jesus?

All of his effort, all of his good deeds, all of his own righteousness, he counted them as *loss* and as *rubbish* for the surpassing excellence of knowing Jesus Christ. Amen. The original word for *loss* used in this passage means "to count something as a loss, as if one didn't even break even on a deal." It also means that something has caused damage. There is no benefit to anything that is not from Christ; whatever is not from Christ will deplete and damage our souls. The word *rubbish* in the original language literally means *manure*. We have a choice to make then as Christians: treasure vs. manure. Hard choice, right? But, how often have I chosen a TV program over reading my Bible or a novel over time in His Presence?

If you can remember life before you came to Christ, please list what was valuable to you at that time.

How valuable are those things to you now?

Have you recently given up anything in order to follow Christ more closely?

I recently read that it is not so much evil things or sinful things that are dangerous to Christians as far as living an abundant meaningful life is

concerned. For a Christian sometimes *good* things are more dangerous than outwardly bad things. Ponder on this for a moment.

How can *good things* be more dangerous to Christians than sinful things?

If something is overtly sinful or blatantly immoral, most Christians will recognize these things for what they are and make an effort to avoid them. Something *good* however poses a different problem. If something is *good*, and does not go against the teaching of God's Word, one can be lulled into the complacency of settling for what is *good*. But as Christians we have to give up what is *good* in order to follow Jesus into what is *best*. God has never meant for our relationship with Him to be a *good* part of our lives; He intends for our relationship with Him to be the *treasure* of our lives.

Now let's go back and consider verse 44 again.

When we treasure our relationship with God what will it bring us?

Great joy! God does not promise us this great joy if we live half-heartedly for Him, He doesn't want us to give Him a few minutes of each day...our leftovers. He wants us to abide with Him for the whole day! He wants our everything...all other commitments, possessions, and hobbies need to take second place in comparison to our relationship with Him.

In the past, when I have read this parable, I have mistakenly thought that the man discovered the treasure in a certain field and then went to buy that field. According to the text, however, I now believe that the man discovered the treasure elsewhere, hid it in the field, and went and sold all he had in order to buy the field. So, why did he buy the field? Why not just take the treasure home *and* keep all his possessions? According to Jewish tradition, if a man bought a field, he was entitled to anything that was found on the property. In buying the field the man was ensuring that the treasure that he placed in the field would truly be

his. Ownership of this priceless treasure was worth sacrificing all that he had; how like the kingdom of God! The kingdom of God is worth far more than anything the world could possibly offer. As long as we treasure the things of the world above God, they will hinder our relationship with Jesus. He will never truly be ours until we can lay all of our stuff aside and put Him first. Why? Because where our treasure is, our heart will be also.

Was there a set price to buy the field?

There was no given dollar amount; but the man had to be willing to part with all that he owned to gain the treasure. This same concept applies to us as well. Anyone may enter the kingdom of God as long as they are willing to accept Christ as their Savior and place Him above all other things. Everyone who chooses may qualify!

According to Matthew Henry, "the Gospel is the field in which this treasure is hid." Therefore, what is the Treasure that is hidden in the Gospel? Jesus!

Now please read verses 45 and 46 again.

Verses 45 and 46 liken the kingdom heaven to what?

To a merchant seeking to buy beautiful pearls. I almost didn't bother to look up the word *merchant* because I thought I already knew what it meant; a store owner. Thankfully, I decided to look it up anyway. I was surprised to discover that in the original Greek the word *merchant* means "one on a journey by land or by sea, especially for trade." We've all been on a journey to find Jesus haven't we? And when we find Him we *trade* our sins for His righteousness; our filthy rags for His robes of righteousness; our ashes for His crown of beauty. We benefit greatly from this trade.

As stated in verses 45 and 46, the merchant was on a trip, seeking to buy many pearls to sell or trade. But this trip was different. While

hunting for pearls to stock his shop, he discovers the perfect pearl. On this trip, instead of buying many pearls, he purchased one pearl—a pearl of significant value! Ironically, the merchant sold all that he had in order to gain one pearl that he will never sell! Prior to finding the Pearl of Great Price, all the other pearls the merchant bought, he quickly sold to make a profit. Since the merchant sold all of his stock in order to purchase the Pearl of Great, this pearl therefore became the *business* of his life.

How would it look if Jesus became the main *business* of your life?

Is anything in the way of Jesus becoming your treasure?

How is a treasured item treated?

What can you do to treasure Jesus more?

In addition to the kingdom of heaven, is there anything else that God wants us to treasure? Please look up the following verse and record what you learn.

We are to treasure:

Psalm 119:162

Proverbs 7:1

Perhaps you are wondering "What does God treasure? What is important to Him?"

Please look up Deuteronomy 7:6 and record what you learn.

Let us close by reflecting on the following verse:

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age,

so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

We are His special treasure and He is ours!

By Mary Kane

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ⁱ Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *parabolē* (Strong's 3850)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2010. 16 Aug 2010. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G3850&t=KJV> >

ⁱⁱ Stalker, James. "Kingdom of God (Of Heaven), The", *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*. Edited by James Orr. Blue Letter Bible. 1913. 5 May 2003. 15 Feb 2011. <[http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?type=GetTopic&Topic=Kingdom+of+God+\(Of+Heaven\),+The&DictList=4#ISBE](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?type=GetTopic&Topic=Kingdom+of+God+(Of+Heaven),+The&DictList=4#ISBE)>