

The Gospel According to Matthew

By

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

MATTHEW 13:44

WE now turn to the second section of the parables, that is, to those which the King uttered to His disciples alone. Having left the multitudes, His disciples gathered about Him in the quietness of the house. There, first in answer to the request they preferred, He explained to them the parable of the darnel, and then proceeded to give them further instruction.

As we turn to the consideration of these parables we must still bear in mind that our Lord is dealing with the subject of the Kingdom in the age between His advents. The view-point now, however, is changed.

There are distinct differences between the first four and the last four parables.

In the first series the King was addressing Himself especially to men of sight, to those who would watch events, to those who, in all probability, would be intellectually interested in the progress or failure of the Kingdom He had preached; that is, to men who were not in the Kingdom, but who viewed it from the outside as interested spectators.

He had therefore dealt with such aspects of the Kingdom as would be patent to all observers the different results dependent upon the quality of the seed,

- The enemy's imitation,
- The unnatural development of the Kingdom principle into material power,
- The corruption of the Church's influence by the introduction of wrong methods.

All these have been evident to those who have watched in every successive age.

Now, in the parables which remain, the King addresses Himself no longer to men of sight. He speaks from this moment exclusively to men of faith, to such as live not merely in the consciousness of things seen, but in the confidence of things unseen.

Therefore, as *in speaking to the men of sight He had dealt with the evident things* of the Kingdom, so *in speaking to men of faith He set forth the hidden things* of the Kingdom.

Having declared what the external manifestation of the Kingdom would be in this age, He proceeded to show to His own circle of disciples what God is accomplishing.

The parables we are considering, therefore, will teach us the specific values of the Kingdom in this age, from the standpoint of the Divine purpose and economy. Let us, then, pause to glance in broad outline at these parables which we are about to consider.

- The first one sets forth the relation of this age to the purpose of God for the whole world. The great sentence is, "**He . . . buyeth that field.**"
- In the parable of the pearl we see the relation of this age to other spheres and other ages. It is the story of the gathering out from this age of all the precious treasure which is to belong to succeeding ages, and in them to have its mission.
- In the parable of the dragnet there is revealed the method of this age in the economy of God.
- Finally, the parable of the householder, bringing things new and old out of his treasure house, indicates the responsibility of the disciples in this age, in view of the teaching of all the former parables.

In considering the first in order, the parable of the treasure, we shall follow our usual habit, and notice, first, the picture presented.

In doing so, we must still bear in mind the principle insisted upon, of the consistency maintained in the use of the figures in these parables as throughout all the Bible. Bearing this in mind, we find two figures we have already met with, and which have had explanation. There are also two new figures at which we shall specially look.

The figures already used are those of the field and the man. The field has appeared before, and we have seen the Son of Man sowing therein His good seed, and the enemy sowing his darnel. We have, moreover, seen the mustard seed planted in the field. What the field was in the earlier parables, it is also in this. We go back to our Lord's direct explanation "**The field is the world.**" The field, therefore, in which the treasure was discovered and hidden is the world.

The second thing in this parable which we have met with before, is the man. In each case he has been the King Himself the sower of the seed in the first parable, the man who sowed the good seed in the second, and again, the man sowing the mustard seed. The man, then, in this parable who finds the treasure and then hides it, is the Son of Man Himself.

Of the new elements in the parable:

- The first is that of the treasure, hidden in the field, discovered, and hidden again.
- The second element, which is new, is that of purchase, and purchase at cost, He "**goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.**"

This presence of two old figures with the two new ones in our parable should help us in the study of it.

On two points we are relieved of the necessity for speculation. Concerning the field and the man, we start with light already in our possession. I think, in the light of these things, we may now discuss the new figures, those of the treasure and of purchase.

It will immediately be seen that our interpretation of the parable will conflict with the popular conception of its meaning, which explains both the treasure in this parable and the pearl in the next as a type of salvation, or Christ.

If that be so, then the man who found the treasure in one case, and the pearl in the other, is the sinner. Any such view contradicts the figurative language of the earlier parables, and is indeed nothing short of absurd. It may be said that this is a strong statement to make. I make it, nevertheless, without hesitation.

If, indeed, the hidden treasure is salvation, and I am the man who finds, then I am able to purchase that which contains my salvation, and am saved by selling all I have. My own conception of my true position is that when I seek for salvation, my condition is bankrupt, and I can only obtain it as the free gift of God's grace.

If the hymn which we have sometimes sung be true:

"I've found the pearl of greatest price!
My heart doth sing for joy;
And sing I must, for Christ is mine!
Christ shall my song employ,"

Then it is possible for me out of something I possess to purchase Jesus Christ. It surely needs no argument to prove that there is no warrant in Scripture, or indeed in the experience of men, for accepting such a view of the method of salvation. Claiming, then, that the two figures referred to have their true explanation in the use made of them in the earlier parables, we affirm that the man who found the treasure is Christ, and that the field in which He hid the treasure is the world. We turn at once to the teaching of the parable concerning the treasure, and concerning its purchase.

If we think in all simplicity of the field as the world, there can be very little difficulty in discovering what the treasure is which the King finds therein. That hidden treasure is the latent possibility in the world of the realization of the Kingship and government of God.

The principles of that government, the order of that government, and the beauty of that government all constitute the treasure hidden in the world. The world is made for the display of the Kingdom and government of God. The being whom God placed in dominion is in rebellion against Him, and therefore the whole territory lies waste, failing to realize, and therefore failing to manifest, the breadth and beauty and beneficence of the Kingdom of God. Supposing, for the sake of argument, that this world is under observation by other worlds, does it reveal these things?

It may be said that this is a piece of gratuitous imagination, but I submit that it is quite in order, for if we do not know that other worlds are observing ours, revelation has assured us that the "**angels desire to look into** (these things)," and it is impossible not to believe that the earth is the center of observation in the universe of God.

My question, then, is, supposing other worlds are watching this world, does the present condition of things exhibit the glory of the Divine government? There are some aspects, some places, and some matters, concerning which of course our answer would have to be, Yes.

For eyes which are clear enough to see, every flower that decks the sod exhibits the glory of the Divine government; and the coming of seed-time and harvest, and the regular rotation of the seasons, attest the perfection of His rule. But in all the higher facts of life is there not everywhere manifest a condition of chaos? Taking men, not in any individual case, or even, perhaps, in the small circle of personal friendship, but in the broad outlook upon humanity as a whole, does the human race exhibit the glory of God's Kingship?

Are there not in the world habitations of cruelty? Are there not places where darkness dwells and devilry obtains? Or if we come to the places upon which the light is falling, do we not find that what we call civilization is endeavoring to make unrighteous profit out of the uncivilized?

I imagine that were I a visitor from some other planet I should be inclined to say, Where is God? The earth is made for Him. It is His, and in every blade of grass there thrill the forces of His life, and every flower sings the song of His glory, but when I come to examine the men who should be supremely expressing the fact of God's government, I cannot discern the glory of the Kingdom. It is not yet clearly manifest.

The world does not know it experimentally, and cannot therefore reveal what the Kingdom of God really means. We sing of it, and speak of it, and imagine that we see it in the light of morning, and the darkness of night. It has been the perpetual refrain of the song of prophets, seers, and psalmists; but experimentally the world has not found it. It is the supreme fact, and yet it is hidden.

But the man in the parable found it.

The finding was not a discovery which startled him. He knew that the field contained the treasure, and he came deliberately to seek it.

What does this parable suggest concerning the Kingdom?

First, that the King knew this hidden fact of the government of God in the world.

- He, looking through the chaos, clearly saw the cosmos.
- He, looking at the sheep scattered and harried by wolves, saw through and beyond the vision to the still waters and quiet resting-places and the flock of God shepherded from all harm.
- He saw the Kingdom as it ought to be through the Kingdom as it was.
- He knew the hidden secret of the world.

This is one of the fundamental truths necessary to the understanding of all Christ's work, and necessary, moreover, to any cooperation with Him in service.

What is equal to the sustenance of the heart in strength in the midst of the travail and toil of Christian service? Simply a clear vision of the Divine possibility which lies behind all the dereliction, both in the case of the individual and of the world at large. It was this hidden treasure which this man knew of and brought to light. He knew that where ruin reigned, order might prevail. He saw that every man, and all society, yes, and every blade of grass, and every inch of earthly territory, were of God and through God, and could only realize their latent possibilities in relation to His Kingship. He discovered in the world the treasure, the Kingdom idea.

Jesus exhibited this in strange ways during His ministry.

- He declared it with unceasing iteration.
- His one message as He passed from place to place was that of the Kingdom of God. Flowers? God clothed them. Children? God's angels guarded them. Men? God's Kingdom was their first concern.
- He saw that everything was in God and of God, and He set Himself to tell men that God is King.
- He revealed in the flashes of His simplest sentences, and in the glory of His set discourses, the truth concerning the unrealized values of the world.
- He came into the field in which His treasure was hidden.

It existed though men did not know it. Every man was capable of God's government. All society was waiting for the recognition of the throne. The whole world needed the Divine administration. But all this was hidden from the eyes of men. Men were in rebellion, nature was in rebellion. Sin and sighing were everywhere. Or, to put the whole fact in the forceful language of the apostle, **"The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."** Behind the ruin He saw the possibility, and in teaching and doing He discovered this possibility to His age, and, to all subsequent ages. In His personal life He realized all that the psalmist declared concerning man (Psalm 8). He had dominion over fish and fowl, and over the beasts of the field. In the hour of His temptation He was **"with the wild beasts."** That is not a statement inspiring terror, but revealing a truth full of beauty. He was with them in comradeship, Master of them, because He was God's perfect Man.

If this Man came and discovered treasure, He also hid it.

Here perhaps is the touch of greatest mystery in our parable. It affirms the hiding of the treasure discovered. What have we that is parallel to this in the case of Christ? If we think of His ministry and interpret our parable in the light of it, we shall find that this is exactly what He did.

He Who called people to the Kingdom of God, because of their refusal, because of their rejection of Him as King, shut the door of the Kingdom against them. By solemn act He rejected the nation, pronounced eight woes over against His eight Beatitudes, announced the doom of Jerusalem, flung out the city from the place of government, and hid these things from the wise and prudent.

Then as Redeemer King, He prevented the manifestation of the glory of God in material magnificence and proceeded to the administration of the Kingdom in redemption and grace.

This parable does not cover all the ground. There are other things not dealt with here.

It does, however, reveal what is the relationship of the Kingdom of God to this age:

- This is the age which rejects Christ.
- It is the age of the Church, which is the realization of the Kingdom within its own borders.

It exists to realize its principles, and reveal its beauties, and call men individually into relationship with it. But socially, and by act of Parliament, even the Church cannot establish the Kingdom of God. That will be done eventually, but only by the King Himself.

Our hope for the world is in the coming of the King to rule with a rod of iron. I never quite understand why men tremble when they hear that He rules with a rod of iron. The rod of iron is not a terrible thing. It is that which is perfect in its straightness, inflexible in its rule. We thank God for One Who will rule with a rod of iron. The world has suffered so long from ruling by reeds which bend and break. It has been cursed for ages by india-rubber government.

The King purchased, not the treasure only, but the whole field.

- Carefully notice the passion which lay behind the purchase - **“For joy thereof.”**
- Notice, moreover, the price paid **“all that he hath.”**
- Notice, finally, the purchase **“He . . . buyeth that field.”**

First, then, how came that joy of heart in the finding of the treasure?

The question can only be answered by asking another. What was the treasure, the finding of which filled Him with joy? *It was the certainty of the possibility of setting up the government of God.*

That was always the joy of Jesus. It is His personal word, **“I delight to do Thy will, O my God.”**

Concerning that thought we may get light from the great classic passage in the letter to the Hebrews. The writer had been speaking of the men of faith who had seen in the dim distance the city of God, of the men who had turned their backs upon the failure all about them, and lifted their faces towards the light of God’s great city. Having spoken of such he wrote:

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

What was the joy?

That of the certainty that after the passion should come the fulfillment of purpose the building of the city of God, or, in other words, the realization in the world of the Kingdom of God.

For that joy He sold all that He had. The joy which constituted the strength of the Cross was the joy of leading back to God in reconciliation that which had wandered from Him. He came down into the world, and knew its possibility, knew its hidden treasure; but He knew that it was bound by chains of gold to the throne of God, and that its anthem could only be perfectly sung as it realized its fundamental relationship, and answered it in full surrender. He recognized that every man was capable of worship, and the whole social order capable of a perfect realization, and the whole world capable of singing the anthem of God's praise. The joy of that certainty was the strength in which He "**endured the cross, despising the shame.**"

The man in the parable sold all that he had. The equivalent to that in the case of Jesus is: He "**emptied Himself,**" and made Himself of no reputation. Who "**endured the cross, despising the shame.**"

By this infinite sacrifice He purchased the whole field. The whole world is redeemed, waiting to be claimed. That sacrifice was necessary. Had Jesus Christ remained an ethical Teacher merely, He could not have set up God's Kingdom. There must be the intrusion into the ruin of a new regenerative dynamic. He must change the nature of the dog ere it can appreciate holy things. He must refashion and absolutely change the nature of the swine ere pearls will have any value. He bought the whole field at cost.

I should like to say one word in this connection concerning the word bought or purchased. Never read into this word as it represents the work of Jesus anything merely of a commercial nature. To do so is to bring oneself into inextricable confusion.

We shall ask from whom He purchased the field.

I have heard it said that He purchased it from the devil. Never! He never granted the devil's right to it. He never paid to the devil any price for the possession of the world.

Then I hear it said that He purchased it from God. He was God. There was never the slightest difference between Himself and God. He did not attempt to persuade God to any new line of action, or to any line of action out of harmony with His own nature.

It is impossible to read into this merely a commercial explanation. There is a use of the word which is more in harmony with its intention here.

A man finds himself beset by robbers, and, speaking afterwards of the peril, he declares that he determined to sell his life dearly. That is the true figurative use of the word. Or another man, who has rescued some precious thing at the cost of suffering, declares he has purchased it at great price.

We know that in neither case is there the thought of purchase by commercial interchange, but that of securing the desired thing by strife and tears and pain. In that sense Christ purchased.

We **“were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver or gold”** that is commercialism - **“but with the precious blood of Christ”**

That blood was not handed over to meet the devil’s demand, nor even to persuade God. That outpouring of blood was the material interpretation of that passion of God, through which the world in which the treasure was hidden might be redeemed by passion, at the deepest heart of which is joy, and the expression of which is pain.

The man of faith will be conscious of all that the man of sight sees in this particular age. Yet the things of sight cannot make the man of faith hopeless, because he has heard the teaching of this parable.

It gives me Christ’s estimate of possibility.

Christ’s purchase of the world makes Him possessor of the world, and that is the guarantee of His ultimate realization of all upon which His heart is set. If in the one point of His hiding the treasure for a while there is an element of mystery, I am still perfectly sure of its infinite wisdom, and I know that presently, as a result, the manifestation will be more perfect and more glorious.

Yet, finally, remember He does not hide from faith.

To trust Him is to have revealed in the deepest life the glory of the Kingdom upon which His heart is set. He will kindle in the heart of the faithful the joy which made Him endure, and so equip them also for that suffering with Him which must eventuate in triumph with Him.

~ end of chapter 37 ~

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