

**Parables of the Heart**  
***“Jesus’ Greatest Treasure”***

Passages: Psalm 135  
Matthew 13:44

Do you like treasure hunts? Well, this morning, we come to the fifth parable of Matthew 13 known as ***“the Parable of the Buried Treasure”***. At first glance, it looks like a classic treasure hunt; somewhat similar to the treasure hunt currently going on in New Mexico, where, 3 years ago, millionaire Forrest Fenn hid a treasure chest filled with gold and precious jewels. Watch this.

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Now, of course, the treasure hunt in Jesus’ parable is very different to the treasure hunt going on in New Mexico! In the parable, we don’t know **who** hid the treasure, or even **why** the treasure was hidden! All we know is that a man found it; then, he secretly covered it back up until he could buy the whole field in which it was hidden.

Listen to the parable again: ***“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”***

Now, the most common interpretation of this parable goes like this:

- Jesus and His Kingdom are “the hidden treasure”.
- You and I are the “man” of the parable. (We are the “treasure hunters”.)
- When we discover “the treasure” (the Kingdom of Heaven), we must sell all that we have, whatever the cost, in order to buy it. That’s because this treasure is worth far more than anything we could ever possess on earth!

Have you heard this interpretation? **If so, then try to get it out of your mind!** I am convinced that this old interpretation is not only false, but it’s extremely dangerous! Why?

To start with, this interpretation insinuates that God has deliberately hidden the treasure of His Kingdom from humanity! Now, tell me, does this idea ring

true? Is God like Forrest Fenn, merely playing a game with us? I don't think so! The Scriptures put us in no doubt that God wants to *reveal* His kingdom to human beings— not *hide* it! God Himself has said, ***“I desire not the death of a sinner, but that all might come to me and live!”*** His greatest desire is reveal the Kingdom of Heaven to everyone who seeks it.

But there's a second reason why this old interpretation is wrong: It totally ignores the second part of the parable! If you remember, soon after the man discovers the treasure, he covers it up again, keeping it a secret from others until he can buy the field for himself. Now, how does that fit in this interpretation? Are we meant to keep the Kingdom of Heaven a secret from each other? Is it some sort of individual contest? Of course not! No wonder this part of the parable is so often ignored-- it simply doesn't gel with our common interpretation!

There's one more problem with this interpretation. Even if the Kingdom of Heaven was a treasure that we were meant to find, it is never *something that we have to buy!* And yet, that's the conclusion you certainly must come to—we need to give up everything before God will give us the Treasure of His Kingdom! This, of course, cannot be correct! According to the Scriptures, God's Kingdom is a free gift!

There must be another way (a far more Biblical way) to interpret this parable! And that's what I want to show you. In fact, I believe the basics of the parable are quite simple to discern, thanks to the fact that **this parable follows the exact same pattern that we've seen in the other four parables.**

- There is one central character (either a man or a woman). **This central character is always Jesus.**
- There is some type of field (either a farm, or a garden, or dough). **This field always represents the world.**
- There is always something small (be it *seeds* or *yeast*) which is “hidden” in the field or dough. **This small “hidden” thing is always directly related to the Kingdom of Heaven.**

What this means is that **we already have all the necessary clues as to how to approach today's parable!** Let me show you.

- The “man” (Jesus) comes to a “field” (the world). (He is the treasure hunter!)
- Out in the field, He finds a small hidden thing—it's a treasure (the Kingdom of Heaven).
- After uncovering it, the man (Jesus) decides to hide it again, and go away until he can buy the entire “field” (the world) in order to finally claim the treasure for Himself.

Now, you're probably saying to yourself, "**OK, I can see how Jesus could be the treasure hunter. He has come into the world looking for treasure. That fits in with what He said—*“The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.”*** But, if the treasure is supposed to be *the Kingdom of Heaven*, in what way was it ever buried? And in what way did Jesus ever uncover it?"

Let me respond to those questions with another question: *“Was the Kingdom of Heaven ever on earth prior to Jesus' incarnation as a man?”* Think back to Genesis 1 and 2. The Kingdom of Heaven was 1<sup>st</sup> established on this earth when God created Adam and Eve! We're told that God planted a Garden called “Eden”; a place where God and humanity would live in perfect relationship. This was Paradise; this was *the Kingdom of Heaven* on earth!

Of course, we know that this Heavenly Kingdom was lost to sin and Satan at the Fall. But we also know that God would initiate a new form of His Heavenly Kingdom on earth in the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This Kingdom would then expand under the leadership of Moses, and flourish under the kingly rule of David and Solomon. What I'm driving at is this: **The Kingdom of Heaven, lost at the Fall, was re-established on earth in the tiny nation called Israel!** In other words, **Israel was God's treasure** because the Kingdom of Heaven was in her midst!

This fits perfectly with the rest of the Old Testament—particularly in the way that God regularly referred to Israel as His ***“treasured possession”***! Here are just two examples:

- Ex 19:5-- ***"Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, <sup>6</sup> you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."***
- Psalm 135:4—***"For the LORD has chosen Jacob to be his own, Israel to be his treasured possession."***

Why did God make Israel His treasured possession? Did Israel do anything to earn His favour? Not at all! Rather, it was what God was doing *in them* that made them His treasure. As His chosen people, they were set apart from the nations *to be a showcase of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth!* They were chosen to be a visible demonstration of God's Kingdom on earth; one that would attract the nations to Jerusalem, bring them to faith in God, and thus expand the Kingdom of Heaven over the whole earth!

This was God's purpose for Israel. And there was a time when this purpose was (at least partially) fulfilled. Think back to the days of King Solomon. In his early years as king, the surrounding nations would look at Israel and literally see the Kingdom of Heaven on earth! Isn't that why **the Queen of Sheba** came to visit King Solomon? She was so amazed by what she had heard that she decided to pay Solomon a visit. When she saw the splendour of Israel, she asked Solomon the secret of Israel's great success. Solomon took her to the Temple and showed her the worship of Yahweh, explaining that it was Israel's relationship with God that was the source of everything they had! The Queen of Sheba was so impressed that, when she returned to her own country, she took this new knowledge of God with her. As a result, the Kingdom of Heaven expanded on earth, just as God had intended!

**This, I believe, is at the heart of today's parable.** In Jesus' mind, Israel was God's treasure, chosen to be the base from which the Kingdom of Heaven would spread throughout the earth. (Interestingly, Jesus alludes to the story of the Queen of Sheba only one chapter earlier, in Matthew 12!)

**But**, as we know from Scripture, soon after the Queen of Sheba's visit, Israel began to implode! Solomon became an idolater; His leadership disintegrated; and Israel was torn in two! And from that day on, no other foreign dignitary would ever come to Jerusalem... except those who came to make war!

And so, what the parable is saying is quite simple: By the time Jesus (“the man”) came into the world (“the field”), **all He could find was a buried treasure**. Through her idolatry and internal strife, **Israel had**, in fact, **buried herself!** The voice of God was absent and His glory was gone. Israel was now subject to the Romans and the Temple was overrun with false teachers and moneychangers. Truly, *the Kingdom of Heaven* was now hidden; buried under the rubble of this once formidable nation!

And that’s the first thing that Jesus was trying to tell His disciples through this parable—He wanted to reassure them that **He came to uncover the hidden treasure of the Kingdom of Heaven buried inside Israel**. Indeed, that’s exactly what Jesus started to do as He taught, as He healed the multitudes, and as He drove out demons. That’s what He was doing when He fed the thousands with bread and fish, or when He walked on the waters of the Sea of Galilee.

Throughout the opening years of His ministry, **Jesus was gradually uncovering the hidden treasure of the Kingdom of Heaven that was buried in the midst of this broken and defeated nation of Israel**.

(What Jesus was doing reminds me of the wonderful work that archaeologists do! They uncover the former glories of a nation; they unlock the secrets of the past that once made a nation so great. **Jesus, the great archaeologist!**)

Now, I know what you’re probably thinking at this stage. You’re wondering **how** the rest of the parable fits in with that explanation. You’re wondering **why** the parable goes on to tell us that, once the man had uncovered the treasure, He decided to *bury it again* until He could go and buy the entire field. How does this fit with my interpretation of the parable?

To answer that question, we need to understand the context in which today’s parable was given. You see, when Jesus delivered the first four parables, he was out in public, sitting in a boat on the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee. As such, these first four parables were general in their scope; they describe the way in which the Kingdom of Heaven is at work amongst the general population of humanity.

*Starting with today’s parable*, however, there’s a new context! As verse 36 makes clear, at one point Jesus leaves the crowd and goes into someone’s

house. From this point on, Jesus speaks in private, and **only to His disciples!** **This is very significant!** Why?

Do you remember, back at the beginning of this sermon series, how I told you that these 7 parables in Matthew 13 could be called “**Parables of the Heart**”? Today’s parable, however, is not about **our** hearts-- it’s about the hearts of **Jesus’ original disciples!** Think about it! They could see that a huge rift was forming between Jesus and Israel’s power brokers, the Pharisees. As such, they would have been increasingly concerned about the situation that they getting themselves into; struggling to make sense of the relationship between *the Kingdom of Heaven* (that Jesus was proclaiming) and the future of *national Israel* (that the religious leaders were vigorously defending). You can imagine how increasingly conflicted and confused they were becoming!

It’s like watching the World Cup when (like me) your heart is torn between two loyalties. Can you imagine my turmoil if, by some miracle, Australia and the USA were fighting it out in the final? **This is what the disciples must have felt.** Their hearts would have been torn in two; divided between a deep love for **Jesus** and a deep love for their homeland, **Israel**?

(Interestingly, even the great Apostle Paul felt this same tension when, in Romans 9, he said, <sup>2</sup> ***I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.*** <sup>3</sup> ***For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race,*** <sup>4</sup> ***the people of Israel.*** Paul felt a deep tension in his soul between his loyalty to Israel and his love for Jesus! )

I believe that this is why Jesus gave this **Parable of the Hidden Treasure!** In this parable is the solution to that inner tension!

In the first place, it teaches that, despite Israel’s many failings; and despite the fact that she rejected Jesus, the Messiah; a time will come when she will be restored to faith in Him. The parable makes it clear that, although (in the scheme of God’s universal salvation) Israel has been buried for time, **she will be uncovered again.**

Once again, the apostle Paul confirms this truth in his letter to the Romans. In chapter 11, Paul writes that, one day, Jesus will uncover Israel and a huge revival will come to the Jewish people. She will be grafted back into the Olive Tree. ***“I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial***

***hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.  
<sup>26</sup> In this way all Israel will be saved."***

I know these words are hard to believe, but they align perfectly with the Parable of the Hidden Treasure. God has not forsaken the Jewish people.

But there's a second truth that comes out of this parable that is of greater importance to us today. As Gentiles, we need to remember that it was only because Israel rejected Jesus that He was free to *turn away from Israel* (burying it temporarily in the ground) and *turn His face fully towards the Gentiles!* In some mysterious way, the rejection of Jesus by Israel was actually for the benefit of the nations! Again, let us listen to Paul in Romans 11:11-12!

***"...because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. <sup>12</sup> But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!"***

In the end, Jesus crucifixion was strangely turned to work in our favour—**for, by Christ's blood, the field of this world was finally purchased!** And, indeed, this is where the last part of the parable comes in! We're told that the man, (Jesus) ***"...in his joy went and sold all he had and bought (the field)."*** Jesus went to the cross with joy because He knew that this was the only way to buy the field! This fits in perfectly with what Hebrews 12:2 says about Jesus: ***"...who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*** On the cross, Jesus sold *"all He had"*. He gave up everything, including His life, in order to "purchase" the world!

Now, tell me, Who did He purchase it from? Go back to Genesis! For, on the day when Adam and Eve fell, **Satan** became the ruler of this earth...by default! That's because no human being was free from sin and, thus, capable of ruling the world in perfect love. Sin had disqualified the human race from being God's vice-regents...and so, Satan took control.

But Jesus, through His total selflessness, proved that He was the perfect human being. He proved He was **able to rule this world as the restored 'image of God'**. That is how Jesus "purchased" the field; He did it with His blood...His selfless death! As the only man without sin, God raised Him up to become the Second Adam, the restored image of God, and God's vice-regent to rule over this earth! That's why we call Him "Lord". And now, as Lord, He sends out His

new disciples (Jews and Gentiles) to proclaim that this earth is under new management. Every nation, race, tribe and tongue must know that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. This is the Gospel!

**Now can you see why Jesus temporarily by-passed Israel, leaving her buried in the ground?** The salvation of the world no longer needed national Israel to accomplish it! In fact, Jesus has raised up a new “treasured possession” in the creation of His church! And, like Moses, He now leads His church to the ends of the earth, to claim every nation as His own!

This, of course, is where we come in! Because of Israel’s rejection and crucifixion of the Son of God, we now have the privilege of being grafted into the olive branch. One day, both Jew and Gentile will gather around the throne of the One True God; Father, Son and Spirit.

So...now that we’ve made some sense of today’s parable, let me see if we can apply it to our day and situation.

Of course, the first application is obvious: Pray for the Jewish people. Jesus didn’t give up on them. Paul didn’t give up on them. Neither should we.

But there’s perhaps something even more practical for us from today’s parable. Think again about the struggle and the tensions that the disciples must have felt in their hearts. **Are there ever times when, like the disciples, your heart is torn between divided loyalties?** ... loyalties that are split between Jesus and your loved ones who have rejected Him? If so, remember one thing: Since His death and resurrection, Jesus is Lord of all! And although that doesn’t mean that everyone will automatically be saved... what it does mean is that, at His coming, we can be confident that **He will not forsake anyone who calls upon His mercy!**

In the end, the Parable of the hidden treasure speaks of God’s incredible mercy and endless grace, to be poured out even on those who once crucified the Lord of glory! Let your heart take comfort in this.

Let’s pray.