

The Parables of the Treasure, the Pearl, and the Good and Bad Fish

Matthew 13:44-50

Matthew 13:44-50 - *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

⁴⁵ *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶ who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.*

⁴⁷ *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, ⁴⁸ which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰ and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”*

Background Notes

In Matthew 13 our Lord gave seven parables of the Kingdom of heaven. The first four parables were given to the multitudes: *“On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. Then He spoke many things to them in parables...”* (v1-3). The last four parables were given only to the disciples: *“Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him....”* (v36).

The Lord gave the interpretation for three of the parables: the parable of the Hidden Treasure, the parable of the Pearl of Great Price, the parable of the Net Containing Good and Bad Fish. We have to interpret the other four parables of the kingdom of heaven for ourselves, using the light of the rest of Scripture.

As we seek to determine the interpretation of these parables, we must remember that the Lord was speaking of the kingdom of heaven is **the kingdom in its present form**. The Kingdom of heaven **not synonymous** with the Church, but it **includes** the Church. The kingdom of heaven is the realm of Christendom today. Christendom is the sphere that covers everywhere that Christianity has spread. We know that Christendom includes the true believers and people who falsely profess to believe because of the parable of the “the wheat and the tares.” When the Lord returns, the true and the false will be separated, but until that time the present form of the kingdom on this earth includes true believers and those who falsely profess faith in Jesus.

Doctrinal Points

1. There is a difference between the Treasure and the Pearl.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (v44-46).

What is the interpretation of these two parables - the treasure hidden in the field, and the pearl of great price? Some Christians interpret both the man who found the treasure and the merchant who found the pearl to be the sinner who finds Christ, because He is the greatest treasure and the priceless pearl. However, that interpretation seems to imply that you can buy salvation because, in the parables, both the field and the pearl are **purchased**. A more consistent interpretation is that the Lord Himself is the man who buys the field with the treasure, and the merchant who buys the pearl. The Lord gave everything that He had to purchase the treasure and to purchase the pearl!

What are the treasure and the pearl? The treasure hidden in the field represents “saved Israel,” and the pearl of great price represents the true Church. Remember – the **context** of this teaching is the Kingdom of heaven **at the present time**. As a result of rejecting their King and His offer of the Kingdom, the nation of Israel was temporarily set aside from its favored position, and the gospel of God’s grace has gone out to the whole world.

But God still has plans for Israel. He is not finished with the Jewish people. Israel is like a treasure hidden in the field. The field is the world. The Jewish people have been scattered throughout the world but **they are still God’s chosen people**. *“For the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His special treasure” (Psalm 135:4)*. They are still God’s treasure.

Despite the fact that most of the Jewish people have rejected Jesus as their Messiah, there has always been a small remnant of faithful and godly Jewish believers. Their numbers will increase in numbers as we get closer to the Lord’s return. This small group of godly believers is the treasure in the field. The Lord went to the cross and gave all that He had - His own life - to reconcile the world to Himself and purchase that treasure. *“...God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19)*.

So godly Jewish believers are the treasure hidden in the field. The King and the Kingdom were rejected by the nation of Israel, and Israel has temporarily been set aside, but that treasure still exists throughout the field of the world! God has His godly remnant of saved Jews, and they will increase in numbers.

“The pearl of great price” is the true Church. The Lord Jesus went to the cross and bought us with His own life, by shedding His precious blood as the perfect Sacrifice: *“You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19).*

We’ve seen that there is a difference between the treasure and the pearl, and there may be even more meaning in the parable of the pearl of great price. As most of you know, a pearl is formed through suffering, and the Church was formed through suffering. Also, we often see in Scripture that “the sea” pictures the world of Gentile nations. As a pearl comes from the sea, so the Church has been primarily mostly drawn out of the “sea” of Gentile nations. There is a wealth of spiritual truth in these two little parables.

2. There is a difference between the “Rapture” and the “Return.”

The parable of the dragnet containing good and bad fish is the last of the seven parables of the Kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13. This parable is very similar to the parable of the wheat and the tares, and the Lord gave the interpretation of this parable as well. The good fish in the net are true believers, and the bad fish are the people who falsely profess faith. The fish are all “in the net” together, just as true believers and false believers are all under the “umbrella” of Christendom.

Notice that the wicked and the righteous are separated at the end of the age, just as we saw in the parable of the wheat and the tares. When is “the end of the age”? It is when the Lord returns to set up His earthly kingdom.

The Lord’s “Return” to set up His kingdom is **not** the same as the “Rapture.” The rapture of the Church (the catching up of true believers from this earth) could occur at any time, but the return of the Lord to set up His millennial kingdom on earth will not come until the future seven-year tribulation period is over. At the **rapture**, those who are saved will be “caught up” (“rapture” means “caught up”) and taken away from this wicked world. At the **return** of the Lord, the wicked will be taken away to judgment and the righteous will be left to inherit the kingdom. The details of the rapture are given in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4, and they are very clear. Believers will be caught up from earth and taken to be with the Lord.

Notice that in both the parable of the wheat and the tares and the parable of the dragnet and fish that the unrighteous are taken away to judgment, and the righteous are left behind for the kingdom. Just the opposite is true of the rapture: the righteous ones, or believers, are taken away from this earth and the unbelievers are left. So don’t try to work the rapture into this parable! The clear teaching of the rapture in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4 says at that the time of the rapture the righteous are taken away, and the unrighteous are left behind.

In the parables of the wheat and the tares and the good and bad fish, the separation of the good and the bad will take place at the end of the age - at the return of Christ. The unrighteous that are taken away in judgment and the righteous are left to inherit the kingdom. This all takes place at the return of Christ to earth at the end of the age.

So there is a difference between the Rapture and the Return. These parables deal with the **Return**. In fact, there is only one mention of the rapture in the Gospels. The great rapture passages are in the epistles - 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4. All the Gospel passages that mention “the return of the Lord” are speaking of His return to His earth to set up His kingdom - except for one. In John 14 the Lord Jesus said, *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”* There our Lord was talking to his disciples - to believers who are part of the Church.

Practical Application

Don't limit the luster of the pearl.

We've seen that the pearl of great price represents the Church, which is the body and bride of Christ. Pearls, as you know, are beautiful gems because of their radiance and luster. The beauty of a pearl comes from the many concentric thin layers of “nacre,” or mother of pearl.

Do you see the illustration? Down through the centuries, the Church has been composed of many “layers” of believers. Together, all believers add to the beauty and luster of the Church. Sadly, the beauty of the Church can be marred when believers live selfish and worldly lives.

Don't take away from that beauty and luster of “God's pearl of great price” by living a carnal, selfish lifestyle. Be a fully committed Christian! Don't mar the luster of the pearl!