

The purpose of this leader's guide is to be a tool for ABF and Life Group leaders to follow the sermon series with their group. Our hope is that this guide will give you a head start for your study and will allow your group to respond to what they've heard and apply it for life.*

Why Parables?. In Definition the word parable comes the Greek word 'parabole,' which means "a placing beside" and therefore is a comparison or an illustration. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain about 30 of these stories while John's gospel contains no parables but does use figures of speech. A parable is a story taken from real life (or real life situation) from which a moral or spiritual truth is drawn. They are not fables (talking animals/walking trees). They are not allegories where every detail has hidden meaning. They are basically an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

When Jesus began to teach in parables, it represented a new direction in His ministry. We are told that from when they were introduced, from this point forward, Jesus typically taught the multitudes in this form. He continued to teach his disciples in a plain manner, but the crowds primarily got parables (Matthew 13:11, Mark 4:11). A common misunderstanding is that parables were given so that all people could easily understand, but upon further study this may not be the case. Although parables were more relatable because they were stories about real life situations, they often had hidden meanings needing further explanation. These hidden meanings challenged the sincerely interested to further inquiry, and taught truths that Jesus concealed from various groups/people (Matthew 11:25, Luke 8:10). The parables teach us about the Sovereignty of God (11-12), the responsibility of man (14-15), and the grace of the gospel (16-17).

Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

Context of Matthew 13:44-46. Jesus begins both parables with 'the kingdom of heaven is like.' We also have to remember that Jesus' audience has a different kingdom in mind that He is speaking of. In these two parables, Jesus likens the kingdom to objects of the greatest value. This value brings a response of total sacrifice and commitment. The message of the parables of the Hidden Treasure and Pearl of Great Price is the same. J.C. Ryle says 'They convey one and the same lesson.' And that lesson is the superlative worth of the kingdom of heaven and the necessity of a whole hearted response. The kingdom of God, Jesus teaches, is worth all and it requires all. The kingdom of God is the rule of God. It is that place where He reigns, where His commands are obeyed. His people are safe and secure in His protection and care for them. It is a place of salvation and redemption. What is it worth to possess it?

Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl tells us that the kingdom of God and our salvation is worth whatever sacrifice necessary to possess it.

1) **Hidden Treasure:** Banks were uncommon in the ancient world. The average person did not place his valuables in a safety deposit box. Most people buried their treasures for safe keeping. Mark Twain in Tom Sawyer says that all little boys dream of the possibility of finding buried treasure. Rarely does this ever happen. Tom and Huck did, but the likelihood of doing so for most people is very small. What has happened in this parable is rare, unusual, and almost impossible. The man in this parable liquidates his assets in order to buy the field and acquire the treasure. He gladly does whatever it takes. This is the case respecting salvation (the kingdom has come to you). To obtain it we must understand the following:

First, I must understand the exceptional value of salvation. It would be one thing to find buried treasure of worldly goods; gold coins, diamonds, or oil. Worldly treasure would mean wealth, luxury, and power. These are treasures for which great sacrifice is easy to understand. But do I understand the value of God's kingdom and it coming to me (salvation). Do I understand the value that my sins are forgiven, that I have peace with God, that I have eternal life, that when I die I will go to heaven, not hell and spend eternity with my Heavenly Father? Do I see this value? These are benefits, but there is also great value in the relationship with the King of that kingdom. This is where the value is greatly missed. There is fulfillment and the only satisfaction for our heart is the joy of knowing God Himself. We can get a glimpse of this in earthly relationships. In marriage, so many people look for what the marriage gives them or what it can do for them and miss out on the joy of truly knowing the other person. This is only a glimpse because even in the greatest marriage, ultimate satisfaction does not come. We fail to love each other perfectly, but God never fails us and can always satisfy the heart. He fulfills the desires of our hearts (Ps. 37:4), He puts gladness in our hearts (Ps. 4:7), He satisfies us with His likeness (Ps. 17:15), In His presence is the fullness of joy (Ps. 16:19), His lovingkindness is better than life itself (Ps. 63:3), His nearness is our good (Ps. 73:25-28). The Apostle Paul speaks of the surpassing value of knowing Christ (Phil. 3:8). Augustine said, 'Our hearts are restless until we find our rest in Thee, O Lord.' Money is a treasure. Things are a treasure, pleasure is a treasure, these are only temporary. But entering the kingdom of God? Only when we see the supreme worth of knowing God will we find it, and finding it we will pursue it.

Second, I must understand the exceptional opportunity for salvation by God's grace. The opportunity to find treasure or true salvation is rare. Many profess but do not obtain. This treasure is in no way ordinary or common. This brings us to a place of seeing God's special grace to us. Who would have thought that I could have such an opportunity? Could I, who is so unworthy? So blind? So corrupt? So ordinary? How can it be? Why should I come to have this treasure, this opportunity? I have found a gracious God, and a sin-bearing Savior, and an invitation to repent, believe, and be saved. Those who value the kingdom, see the magnitude of God's grace and the great treasure that has come upon them.

Third, I must understand the exceptional cost of salvation. 'He sells all that he has and buys the field and acquires the treasure.' It costs him everything. Yet he sacrifices all with joy. Why? Because he sees its value. It is the greatest treasure! He is not burdened by the cost but 'from joy over it,' he sells all to obtain it. We see the cost of salvation in two ways. Salvation is possible because of what Jesus did, but those who find it, will surrender their life to obtain it. Jesus was born to die for our sins, we were saved to lay down our life (to die) for the kingdom (Mark 8:34-36, Gal. 2:20). The cost is great for both, the one who obtained our salvation and for the one who has received salvation. Those who truly see the value of the kingdom, will lay down their life for it.

2) Pearl of Great Price: The merchant in this parable would be a traveling merchant, a substantial trader, a wealthy man is envisioned. Unlike the first parable, the merchant is actively pursuing the pearl. Like the previous parable, the emphasis is on the magnitude of the sacrifice that the merchant makes to obtain it. He demonstrates that no cost is too great when it is a matter of gaining the kingdom. Though he is a wealthy man and has much to lose, he too will do whatever he must do to get the pearl. No cost is too great, and no burden is too heavy, it is worth all that he has. Ryle says, 'those really convinced of the importance of salvation will give up everything to win Christ, and eternal life. Carson says, 'that the kingdom of God is worthy of

every sacrifice, it is worth much more than the price paid, and worth infinitely more than the cost of discipleship. Those who understand this joyfully abandon everything else to secure it.’ This is not a works salvation, but a work God does in the heart of those who secure salvation. Just like the merchant, we must have a clear view of God’s kingdom. What has greater value than eternal life with God? What can this world offer that lasts? What can we take with us after we die? The Apostle Paul when speaking of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord, he admits that for this privilege he had indeed suffered all things but counted these things as rubbish compared to knowing Jesus. In other words, there was no comparison between what he got and what it cost him. Paul looked passed the cost of laying down his life for the things that awaited him in eternity (Rom. 8:18). There is great irony at the center of the Christian life. Salvation is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8,9; Rom. 6:23). On one hand it costs us nothing. We receive salvation apart from works. On the other hand, salvation costs us everything. We follow Jesus without regard for cost. The kingdom of God is a gift, but following Jesus will cost us greatly. If we have truly received this great gift of the highest value, we are commanded to go to those who are deceived in believing that there is great value in chasing after worldly things. May God give us the grace to understand what life is really about, what we are here to do, and what our aim in life should be.

General Reflection:

- 1) What does this passage teach us about God?
- 2) What does this passage teach us about mankind?
- 3) What is a command to obey in this passage? What has God revealed in your life that needs changing? What truth can be applied to your life about the gospel?

Personal Reflection/Application

- 4) What is the kingdom of God likened to in this passage?
- 5) Why is the kingdom and obtaining it, worth so much?
- 6) Why is seeing the great value of God’s kingdom key in obtaining salvation? Why is it key to our witnessing to others?
- 7) In what ways has obtaining God’s great treasure cost you? What are some examples where following Jesus cost you recently?
- 8) How do we respond to someone who says, “I want to follow Jesus, but I don’t want to make drastic changes in my life.”

Prayer

God would you remind me daily of your grace and the gift of salvation I have received. Lord I am willing to give it all up in order to follow you. God I cannot do this though my own strength and will, so would you help me to see the great value of your kingdom.