

MATTHEW 13:31-33 & 44-53

AN OLD ROCK SONG DECLARES: "I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR LOVE IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES. LOOKING FOR LOVE IN TOO MANY FACES, SEARCHING THEIR EYES AND LOOKING FOR TRACES OF WHAT I AM DREAMING OF."

IT CERTAINLY IS TRUE MANY PEOPLE ERR IN WHO AND WHERE THEY LOOK FOR LOVE.

BUT IT COULD ALSO BE SAID THAT MANY PEOPLE LOOK FOR HOPE, JOY, PEACE, AND EVEN TREASURE IN THE WRONG PLACES.

IN FACT IT IS SAFE TO SAY EVERY PERSON HAS BEEN ATTRACTED TO ONE OF MORE OF THOSE THINGS IN PLACES THAT EVENTUALLY PROVED TO BE WRONG.

THE PARABLES JESUS TOLD IN CHAPTER 13 IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW EACH CONCERN WHAT THE LORD WANTS US TO LOOK FOR-THE KINGDOM OF GOD/HEAVEN.

WHERE TO LOOK IS ALSO PRETTY SIMPLE IF WE ONLY HAVE THE EYES TO SEE, THE EARS TO HEAR, AND HEARTS OPEN TO GOD.

JESUS IS THE ONE IN WHOM WE FIND THE KINGDOM, BECAUSE IT WAS BORN ON EARTH, THE MOMENT HE WAS BORN.

TODAY'S SERIES OF SHORT PARABLES CAN BE BROKEN DOWN INTO THEIR BASIC MEANINGS ABOUT THE KINGDOM AS FOLLOWS:

THE MUSTARD SEED IS ABOUT SMALL BEGINNINGS THAT GROW. THE YEAST/LEAVEN POINTS TO HOW THE KINGDOM CAN TRANSFORM US WITHIN.

THE NET SPEAKS TO GOD'S JUDGMENT WHEN ALL IS FULFILLED. THE TREASURE AND PEARL TELL US THE KINGDOM IS WORTH MORE THAN ANY EARTHLY TREASURE OR RICHES.

TODAY, WE WILL FOCUS ON THE PARABLES OF THE TREASURE AND THE PEARL.

TREASURE-EARTHLY TREASURE CAN BE A WONDER TO PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY TANGIBLE TREASURE OF GREAT VALUE OR BEAUTY.

FOR EXAMPLE: IN 1666, A FRENCHMAN PURCHASED A VERY LARGE BLUE DIAMOND, WHILE HE WAS IN INDIA. HE LATER SOLD THE ROUGH STONE TO THE KING OF FRANCE.

THE KING HAD IT CUT DOWN AND SHAPED INTO A SMALLER SIZE, AND THE BLUE DIAMOND BECAME THE CENTER PIECE OF A DIAMOND STUDDED NECKLACE.

THIS TREASURE WAS BOUGHT AND SOLD SEVERAL TIMES UNTIL IT ENDED UP IN THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTE IN WASHINGTON D.C.

TODAY, IT IS KNOWN BY THE NAME OF ONE FAMILY WHO OWNED IT FOR A WHILE. (SHOWN PHOTO)

THE "HOPE DIAMOND", IS INDEED A TREASURE THAT IS PRICELESS IN THE SENSE OF ITS GREAT BEAUTY.

THE DIAMOND IS INSURED FOR AROUND \$240 MILLION DOLLARS, WHICH IS A LOT OF MONEY.

AND YET, IN MANY WAYS THIS EARTHLY TREASURE IS BOTH PRICELESS AND WORTHLESS.

THE LATTER BECAUSE IT IS ONLY FIT AS A MUSEUM PIECE BECAUSE, IT IS DANGEROUS FOR ANY PRIVATE OWNER, SINCE IT WOULD BE A TARGET FOR THIEVES.

OF COURSE ALL OF OUR TREASURES OF LESSER VALUE-MONEY, JEWELRY, AND OTHER OBJECTS ALSO COULD BE STOLEN OR LOST OR DESTROYED.

JESUS MADE THIS VERY POINT EARLIER. IN MATTHEW 6:19-23 THERE HE WARNS US NOT TO STORE UP EARTHLY TREASURE, BUT TREASURES IN HEAVEN INSTEAD.

THE PARABLES SPEAK ABOUT KINGDOM OF GOD AS BEING PRICELESS COMPARED TO EARTHLY RICHES.

NOTICE, THE MAN WHO FINDS THE TREASURE, IMMEDIATELY LIQUIDATES HIS ASSETS TO PURCHASE THE FIELD.

THIS WAS A PERFECTLY ACCEPTABLE THING TO DO, SINCE IF THE ONE WHO SOLD THE FIELD HAD PUT THE TREASURE IN IT HE WOULD HAVE REMOVED IT BEFORE SELLING.

THE TREASURE DISCOVERED IN A FIELD IS A METAPHOR FOR THOSE WHO FIND CHRIST AS THEIR LORD AND SAVIOR UNEXPECTEDLY.

IN OTHER WORDS, THEY WERE NOT SEEKING ANY KIND OF SPIRITUAL FULFILLMENT

BUT THEN, THROUGH A SONG, A BIBLE STUDY, A BIBLICALLY BASED MOVIE, HEARING ANOTHER'S TESTIMONY, OR IN SOME OTHER WAY-THEY FEEL JESUS NEAR AND GRASP HIS HAND.

THE PARABLE OF PEARL IS DIFFERENT IN THAT THE MAN WAS IN FACT LOOKING FOR SOMETHING OF GREAT VALUE.

PEARLS IN ANCIENT TIMES WERE VERY EXPENSIVE. REMEMBER THERE WAS NO DIVING EQUIPMENT, NOR WERE THERE ANY CULTURED PEARLS.

THEREFORE, PEARLS WERE VERY RARE AND HIGHLY VALUED. BY THE WAY, A PEARL, UNLIKE OTHER JEWELS IS NOT MEANT TO BE CUT.

THIS MAKES THE PEARL OF SYMBOL FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD WHICH IS GOD'S CREATION, NOT OURS. WE CAN GROW IT BE A PART OF IT BUT CANNOT IMPROVE IT.

THE MERCHANT WHO FOUND THE PEARL OF HIS DREAMS, REPRESENTS PEOPLE WHO ARE LOOKING FOR GOD, AND COME TO FAITH IN CHRIST WHILE ON THEIR SEARCH.

IN EACH STORY THE ONE WHO DISCOVERS THE TREASURE OR PEARL IS WILLING TO SACRIFICE ALL HE OWNS TO HAVE IT.

WHEN IT COMES TO SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST, WE KNOW THAT JESUS PAID IT ALL. WE RECEIVE THE TREASURE OF THE KINGDOM BY THE GRACE OF GOD, THROUGH FAITH.

AND FAITH ITSELF, HOWEVER WE ACQUIRE IT: BY ACCIDENT, SEARCH, OR SIMPLY GROWING UP INTO IT, IS GIVEN TO US BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.

SO WHAT THEN DOES JESUS MEAN WHEN HE TEACHES THAT FAITH IN HIM, THE SALVATION HE PROVIDES, AND OUR PLACE IN THE KINGDOM, ARE WORTH SELLING EVERYTHING WE OWN?

THE SAVIOR IS SPEAKING ABOUT CHOICES. REMEMBER, JESUS ALSO SAID IN MATTHEW 6: "WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO."

THIS REMINDS US THAT LIVING AS A CHRISTIAN MEANS, HAVING JESUS AS OUR TRUE TREASURE.

DOES THE SAVIOR REIGN IN OUR LIVES, OR ARE WE PULLED AWAY FROM HIM BY DEVOTION TO A POLITICAL FIGURE, A CELEBRITY, OR ANY OTHER PERSON OR ORGANIZATION, OR THING?

I EXPECT MOST CHRISTIANS WOULD SAY "JESUS FIRST", HOWEVER WE ARE EASILY SIDETRACKED OR LED ASTRAY BY WHAT SEEM TO BE MORE PRESSING DESIRES.

FOR EXAMPLE: A YOUNG BOY WAS IN THE CAR WITH HIS FATHER. THEY WERE ON THEIR WAY TO A DONUT SHOP.

THE DAD TOOK THEIR TIME ALONE TO REVIEW WHAT THEY HAD BEEN TEACHING HIM ABOUT GOD.

HE ASKED HIS SON IF HE KNEW WHERE HEAVEN WAS, THE BOY POINTED UP.

THE NEXT QUESTION WAS: "WHERE IS HELL?" THE BOY POINTED DOWN.

HIS FATHER WAS GLAD THE LITTLE ONE HAD BEEN LISTENING TO HIM AND HIS WIFE, AND CONFIDENTLY ASKED A THIRD QUESTION.

“WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO, SON?” THE CHILD FIRMLY REPLIED: “THE DONUT SHOP.”

THIS ILLUSTRATES THE FACT WE ARE NOT ALWAYS FOCUSED ON THE BIG PICTURE, SO TO SPEAK.

BUT JESUS DID NOT COME TO EARTH SIMPLY TO MEET IMMEDIATE NEEDS, ALTHOUGH HE DID HEAL AND FEED COUNTLESS PEOPLE.

HE ALSO COMMISSIONED AND COMMANDED HIS DISCIPLES AND ALL FUTURE FOLLOWERS TO GO AND DO LIKEWISE, AS THE SPIRIT GIVES US ABILITY.

HOWEVER, CHRIST’S MAIN PURPOSE WAS TO BRING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD, TO LAY THE GROUND WORK SO THAT ONE DAY HIS FATHER’S WILL SHALL BE FULLY AND COMPLETELY DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.

AND JESUS DIED FOR OUR SIN AND ROSE AGAIN TO BRING US NEW LIFE HERE ON EARTH, AS WELL AS TO OPEN THE GATES OF HEAVEN.

PART OF THIS NEW LIFE IS TO CALL AND EMPOWER US TO BE HIS BODY IN THE WORLD, TO CONTINUE BRINGING IN THE KINGDOM STEP BY STEP, DAY BY DAY.

OF COURSE, LIKE THE YOUNGSTER ON HIS WAY TO THE DONUT SHOP, WE CAN EASILY GET SIDETRACKED, EVEN WHEN WE HAVE THE BEST INTENTIONS.

INDEED, WE MIGHT SING, WHEN THE TIME COMES THAT WE CAN SAFELY SING AGAIN IN WORSHIP:

“FAIREST LORD JESUS, RULER OF ALL NATURE. O THOU OF GOD TO EARTH COME DOWN. THEE WILL I CHERISH, THEE WILL I HONOR, MY SOUL’S GLORY, JOY AND CROWN.”

BUT EVEN WHEN WE CAN AND DO SING THE WORDS WITH MEANING ONE MINUTE, SO OFTEN THE NEXT, WE ARE DRAWN TO SOMETHING MORE ALLURING IN THE WORLD.

THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM REMIND US THAT EARTHLY LIFE AND ALL ITS TREASURES CAN BE NICE, AND SHOULD BE ENJOYED.

BUT--JESUS ALSO SAYS WHEN CHOICES MUST BE MADE, WE SHOULD ALWAYS CHOOSE HIM. THIS IS THE COST OF THE KINGDOM TREASURE OR PEARL.

THE APOSTLE PAUL SPOKE ABOUT HIS OWN CHOICES CONCERNING THE TREASURES OF THE WORLD, WHICH FOR HIM INCLUDED MUCH MORE THAN MATERIAL TREASURES.

IN PHILIPPIANS THREE, PAUL WROTE ABOUT HIS STATUS AS A PHARISEE, THE HONOR OF BEING AMONG THOSE SEEN BY OTHERS AS THE MOST RIGHTEOUS OF MEN.

BUT THEN HE ALSO WRITES: “YET WHATEVER GAINS I HAD, THESE I HAVE COME TO REGARD AS LOSS BECAUSE OF THE SURPASSING VALUE OF KNOWING CHRIST JESUS MY LORD.”

PAUL TURNED HIS BACK OF ALL HIS RELIGIOUS STATUS AND HONORS TO SUFFER PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL.

HE WAS PERSECUTED BY FELLOW JEWS, AND BEATEN BY GENTILES.

PAUL WAS EVEN MALIGNED BY SOME FELLOW CHRISTIANS WHO DID NOT AGREE WITH HIS PROCLAMATION THAT IN CHRIST THERE IS NO: JEW OR GREEK, MALE OR FEMALE, SLAVE OR FREE.

AND YET HE DID NOT REGRET CHOOSING JESUS, OR WHAT IT COST HIM TO PROMOTE THE KINGDOM OF GOD TO OTHERS.

THIS BRINGS US TO CHRIST’S FINAL SAYING ABOUT THE SCRIBE. HE SPEAKS THERE ABOUT CHRISTIANS.

HE REMINDS US THAT SOME KINGDOM TREASURES ARE FOUND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, AND OTHERS IN THE NEW.

TOGETHER THEY ARE TO BE WISELY STUDIED AND PUT TO USE IN OUR WORK WITHIN THE KINGDOM OF GOD THAT IS BEING FORMED ON EARTH.

ANOTHER WAY TO DESCRIBE THE FORMATION OF THE KINGDOM, IS AS THE BODY OF CHRIST, THE CHURCH.

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER WROTE THIS REFLECTION ON THE PURPOSE OF CHRIST'S CHURCH ON EARTH:

“THE CHURCH IS NOT A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY OF WORSHIPPERS OF CHRIST, BUT IS CHRIST HIMSELF, WHO HAS TAKEN FORM AMONG PEOPLE.”

EACH CHURCH AND THOSE IN THE CHURCH ARE INDEED A REPRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD, AND IF WE ARE NOT- WE SHOULD BE.

IN FACT INDIVIDUALLY AND TOGETHER WE ARE ALREADY PART OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

NANCY TOWNLY, ON THE “MINISTRY MATTERS” WEBSITE, OFFERS A REFLECTION ON THE KINGDOM.

IT BEGINS WITH A PERSON SEEKING TO BUY MUSTARD SEED AND YEAST, AND ALSO PREPARING TO HUNT FOR TREASURE, STUDY ABOUT THE VALUE OF PEARLS, AND TAKE A NET TO GO FISHING.

THEN SHE WRITES: “WITHIN EACH PERSON THERE IS A SMALL SEED, A SMALL GRAIN OF YEAST, A TREASURE, AN ABILITY. THESE LIE WITHIN EACH OF US.

YOU CANNOT PURCHASE THE ITEMS THAT PRODUCE GREATNESS; YOU CANNOT CREATE A SEARCH PARTY FOR TREASURE; IT IS WITHIN YOU.

IT IS THE SPIRIT OF HOPE AND LOVE, OF PEACE AND JOY, OF JUSTICE AND COMPASSION, WHICH DEVELOP INTO ACTIONS THAT BRING ABOUT GOD'S KINGDOM FOR ALL GOD'S PEOPLE.

WE ARE ALL PART OF THIS, EACH ONE OF US, NONE GREATER THAN THE OTHERS.

LET GO OF YOUR NEED TO PURCHASE THE KINGDOM TOOLS; INSTEAD BE A TOOL FOR HOPE AND SERVICE TO THE LORD IN THE WAYS IN WHICH YOU SERVE AND HELP OTHERS....”

THESE ARE CERTAINLY GOOD WORDS TO REFLECT UPON. THEY REMIND US WE ARE SAVED NOT JUST FOR OURSELVES, BUT TO SERVE CHRIST AS LONG AS WE LIVE IN THE WORLD.

PRAISE GOD FOR THE SALVATION JESUS PURCHASED FOR US. PRAISE THE LORD FOR THE TREASURE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN US.

MAY WE BECOME WILLING PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORK OF THE KINGDOM UNTIL CHRIST RETURNS IN ALL POWER AND GLORY, OR HE COMES TO TAKE US HOME, SAYING: “WELL DONE GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT.” AMEN

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