

# The “Twin” Parables— The Hidden Treasure And The Pearl Of Great Price Matthew 13:44–46

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## Introduction

The *Dickson New Analytical Bible* lists thirty-one parables spoken by our Lord. Since I deny that the account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) is a parable, my list contains only thirty. The frequency with which Jesus employed this story-form to teach a wide spectrum of lessons signals to us that this method was one of His favorite vehicles of instruction. He obviously considered parables very effective.

*Parable* is actually an Anglicized Greek word, *parabole*. This compound word means to throw down (*bole*) something beside (*para*) something else. Hence, a parable consists of a story involving human experiences that illustrates one or more spiritual truths. These elongated figures of speech always involve events that either have happened or could happen. Unlike fables, they do not employ impossible or unnatural scenes (e.g., talking animals, trees, etc.). Jesus stated all of the “kingdom parables” in Matthew 13 (except the parable of the sower) in the form of similes: “The kingdom of heaven is likened unto...” (v. 24; et al.).<sup>1</sup> Thus, in these parables we have a figure of speech (simile) within a figure of speech (parable).<sup>2</sup>

Parables generally have only one or, at most, a very few intended lessons. We should beware of mistaking the mere “drapery” or “scenery” of parables for the actual lessons. Some elements of every parable are there only to complete the realism of the story, and they have no further meaning and no application. We should always seek to grasp the lesson or lessons of each parable we study.

We naturally study the parables of the hidden hoard and the precious pearl together because the major emphasis of both of them is the same—thus “twin parables.”

## Background Information

### *Circumstantial Background of the Parables*

These twin parables were the aftermath of a sermon Jesus preached by the seaside near Capernaum—His famous sermon preached from a boat to a large crowd on the seashore (Mat. 13:1–3). Apparently, the Christ had not previously spoken in parables before He began this rapid-fire delivery of them. The apostles were curious about why He began thus speaking (v. 10). He answered that He did so in order to convey to them (i.e., the apostles) essential

elements of “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,” while concealing them from the Jews, especially the scribes and Pharisees (v. 11). They had proved themselves unworthy of this knowledge by closing their eyes and ears and hardening their hearts to His message, even as their fathers had done in the time of Isaiah (vv. 13–16).

The Lord then treated the apostles (and us) to what we might appropriately think of as a class called “The Parables 101.” He explained the meaning of the first parable, the parable of the sower, to the apostles (vv. 18–23). He then immediately addressed the multitude again with additional parables (the tares, mustard seed, and leaven) (vv. 24–33). At this point he departed from the crowd and was with the disciples alone (v. 36a). Here, at their request, He explained to the apostles the parable of the tares (vv. 36b–43). He then told them the parables of the treasure and the pearl, followed by the parable of the dragnet (vv. 44–50).

Following these three parables, Jesus asked the twelve if they understood their meaning, to which they answered that they did. It appears that the Lord told them the meaning of the first two parables not only to teach them their meaning, but also to instruct them in the way to interpret and apply subsequent parables He would tell them. He then told them additional parables, and they were able to comprehend their meanings without His guidance.

### ***Historical Background of the Hidden Treasure Parable***

People in the first century did not have banks or safes in which to secure their gold, silver, gems, costly raiment, or other valuables. If they carried them on their persons they were in danger of being mugged (as was the man in the parable on his way to Jericho [Luke 10:30]). It was therefore a common thing for men to hide their valuables in the safest places they could find. Sometimes they would hide them in their houses, but this practice was not very safe. Thieves could “break [lit., dig] through and steal” one’s earthly treasures (Mat. 6:19).

The man to whom his master entrusted the one talent “went away and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money” (Mat. 25:18). That someone might dig a hole and bury his fortune in a field was a familiar occurrence to Jesus’ listeners. Also, it likely was not uncommon for people to discover such a treasure occasionally. Did Jesus observe a man sowing seed in his field and point to him as He told the parables of the sower and the tares (Mat. 13:3, 24)? Had someone in the area of Capernaum discovered just such a treasure in a field? We are not told whether this was so in either case. However, neither possibility is farfetched.

We are naturally curious about several things Jesus did not include in the parable. Where was the owner of the treasure? Why did the property-owner not know about the treasure? Had the one who buried it died, forgetting to tell his descendants/heirs about it? Had

the landowner buried it in his youth and forgotten he did so or, perhaps, where he did so, in his dotage? Surely, if the burier still owned the field and had merely forgotten where he buried the treasure, he would have retained the property in hopes of someday finding it.

What about the ethics of the finder? Was he dishonest to keep his serendipity secret from the owner while he purchased the field? Some think this behavior was immoral and dishonest. However, others cite Jewish law at that time, which explicitly granted keepers rights to anything one found. Jesus makes no comment concerning this man's guilt or innocence. The ethics of the finder in the parable is totally apart from Jesus' objective in telling it. To center on such questions as how the cache came to be forgotten and whether or not the finder acted ethically is to fall into the trap of confusing parabolic scenery with substance. Jesus did not satisfy such questions because their answers are not germane to His lessons.

Assuredly, all of the details the Lord included in this parable were in harmony with the experience, or at least the possible experience, of His hearers.

### ***Historical Background of the Precious Pearl Parable***

In the previous parable, Jesus used some unspecified kind of treasure to make His point. In this parable he used a specific kind of treasure, greatly valued by first-century Orientals—pearls. Pearls are mentioned only a few times in the Bible, but always in such a way as to emphasize their great worth.

Reportedly, Cleopatra owned two pearls worth \$400,000 each—pearls of great price indeed! Historians indicate that some people valued them not only for their monetary worth, but they desired them just to look at, to hold, and to roll between thumb and finger. Some made their living buying and selling these gems of the ocean. The principal character in this parable was such a merchant.

As before, curiosity provokes some questions concerning features of this parable. Where was this merchant's home? How long had he been trading pearls, and how long had he been searching for the pearl of pearls? What did he do with the pearl after his purchase? Was it perhaps of sufficient worth that he could use it to obtain a comfortable retirement? As noted in connection with the previous parable, such questions all relate to the mere drapery of the story. They have no bearing on the Lord's lesson, and He thus ignored them. Jesus used the stingiest economy of details and words that would still allow Him to make His point

## ***The Parables Compared and Contrasted***

Both parables tell of two men who found treasures. The lessons these parables teach closely parallel each other. Perhaps their principal lesson is to emphasize (by means of a lost treasure in a field or a priceless pearl in the market) the incomparable value of the kingdom of Heaven, the church (Mat. 16:18–19). The several other lessons they hold would seem to flow from this principal point. Because the kingdom is so valuable:

1. It is attainable only by sacrifice.
2. It is worth whatever sacrifice or loss necessary to “acquire” (enter) it.
3. There should be a sense of urgency about doing whatever is required to “obtain” it.
4. There is joy at discovering and procuring it.

The major contrast between the parables is the manner in which the respective men came to find their treasures. There is no indication that the man who discovered the hidden treasure was searching for it. He seems to have stumbled upon it while doing something else. It was thus a serendipity for him. Neither Saul of Tarsus nor the jailer in Philippi was looking for the Gospel Truth when it was suddenly made apparent to them. Yet, both of them readily recognized its worth and “bought” it by their Gospel obedience. Contrariwise, the man who found the pearl did so because he was on a quest for it, and perhaps had been for a long time. He believed it was out there, and he was determined to find it. This man typifies individuals such as the Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius, both of whom were apparently sincerely seeking to know and do God’s will when, in God’s gracious providence, He made it possible for them to find the Truth and the kingdom.

### **What Did Jesus’ Hearers Understand From These Parables?**

We can do little more than offer some possibilities concerning what or how much the original auditors may have learned as they listened to these parables. Remember that Jesus spoke both of them (along with the parable of the dragnet) to the apostles alone, rather than to the people in general. We have already noticed that He gave them somewhat of a template for interpreting His parables by interpreting the first two for them. After He told these last three parables, He asked them if they understood. They said that they did.

What did the apostles understand upon hearing these parables? While we cannot with certainty know all that they may have gleaned from them, they understood them to some degree at least. The Lord asked them if they understood, and they answered affirmatively (v. 51). These men would have had to be incredibly dense (which we do not believe they were) not to understand at least the following point from these parables: The kingdom possesses intrinsic and incomparable value.

We know at least one thing they did not understand in spite of all of the “kingdom parables” and other relevant teaching done by the Lord: the spiritual nature of the kingdom of Heaven. Even after Jesus’ resurrection, they apparently still held the common Jewish misconception that He would restore the literal, political Davidic kingdom and throne (Acts 1:6).

It is likely that the apostles did not grasp some of the applications and meanings of the parables (e.g., the nature of the kingdom, as noted above) until after Jesus ascended and sent the Holy Spirit upon them. When He sent the Spirit, the Lord promised that the Spirit would teach them all things and bring to their remembrance all that He said to them (John 14:26). The Spirit would guide them into all the Truth, which included the things He taught them in person, but which they did not understand (16:13). We can imagine that in light of the fullness of remembrance and revelation, the apostles must have often reflected in post-Pentecost days on all of the parables and their rich content.

### **Application Number One: The Intrinsic Value of the Kingdom**

As indicated above, I believe that the central message/lesson in both of these brief parables is the intrinsic and incomparable worth of the kingdom. One does not have to study very long or far in the Bible to comprehend some of the reasons why the kingdom is so valuable.

#### ***Because of God’s Preparation for Its Establishment***

The kingdom of the parables is the church, which is “according to the eternal purpose which he [God] purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:9–11). The kingdom was thus planned in the mind of the Godhead before time began. Through the centuries God carefully, purposefully moved in His providence through the actions of men to bring His eternal kingdom into reality. At least as early as the time of faithful Abraham God began dropping hints about the kingdom that He would one day establish. From that time on the Old Testament is rife with promises, prophecies, types, and shadows prefiguring and promoting the eternal kingdom.

Finally, God determined it was time: “But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son...” (Gal. 4:4). John, the Lord’s forerunner, was sent before Him, proclaiming, “Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mat. 3:2). After His baptism of John and His victory over Satan in the wilderness, Jesus began to preach, “Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (4:17). Jesus appointed twelve men to be his apostles. The first commission under which they labored involved preaching, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (10:7). He later promised to build His church, and in the same breath told the apostles that the kingdom would be established in the lifetime of some of them (16:18–19, 28; cf. Mark 9:1).

On the Pentecost following the resurrection and ascension of the Lord, the church/kingdom of God and of Christ was established, according to Luke's history in Acts 2. God worked out His plan for the kingdom of His Son so meticulously that the prophets could foretell intricate details concerning its beginning hundreds of years in advance. Isaiah, Daniel, and Joel all flawlessly predicted the time of its inception (Isa. 2:2–4; Dan. 2:44; Joel 2:28–32). Isaiah also named Jerusalem as its place of origin, along with events that would surround its beginning (Isa. 2:2–4).

One must be utterly ignorant, undiscerning, or perverse to miss the point that the kingdom/church is an incomparable treasure. The fact that it occupied the center of God's attention for unknown ages amply demonstrates its value if nothing else does.

### ***Because of Its Cost***

The value and cost of an item are always related. The general rule is that the greater the cost the higher the value and vice versa. It is axiomatic that every building that is erected and every institution that is founded involves cost. So it is with the houses in which we live, the vehicles in which we ride, and the companies which we own or for which we work. This *cost-to-build* principle applies to the spiritual kingdom as much as it does to any material entity.

I am convinced that no human being will be able to express fully the extent of the cost of building/establishing the kingdom. The cost is so immense that it is likely that mere human beings cannot fully comprehend all of the cost involved. However, the Bible gives us some indications to enable us to appreciate the price God had to pay to bring the kingdom into being.

Christ valued the church so greatly that Paul said He paid the ultimate price of His blood for it (Acts 20:28). His blood was not merely that of a good man shed by evil men, although He was surely a good man. Evildoers have shed the blood of many good men and women, but it could not purchase the church of Christ. His blood was not merely that of a martyr for a good cause, although this description of Him is not false. However, there have been many martyrs for good causes, but their blood could not purchase the kingdom of God. He was far more than a martyr. The ultimate value of His blood, making it the sufficient price for the church, lies in the fact that it was perfectly innocent, sinless blood. Of Him alone can it be said that He "hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (He. 4:15; cf. Isa. 53:9, 11; 2 Cor. 5:21; He. 7:26; 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5).

Paul not only spoke of the great cost of the church, but he also wrote about it. The apostle declared that Christ loved and esteemed the church so much that he "gave himself up for it" (Eph. 5:25). Christ had no gold or silver, no jewels, houses, or lands, which He could give

for the kingdom. Had He possessed such they would never have been a sufficient price anyway, though He owned them all. All that He had was Himself—His perfect blood. The fact that the Christ, the sinless Son of God, held back nothing to make the kingdom a reality places the value of that institution beyond our ability to calculate and assimilate.

We should not marvel that this same apostle described the church as “the fulness of him [Christ] that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22–23). Surely none can question the value of the kingdom upon seeing the immensity of its cost.

### ***Because of Its Destiny***

As God’s messenger, Nathan prophesied that David’s son would be given a throne in a kingdom that would last forever (2 Sam. 7:12–13, 16). Five centuries before the Christ came Daniel predicted that in the days of the Roman rulers God would set up a kingdom that would stand forever and that would never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44). When Jesus was born, the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that God would give Him the throne of His father David and an unending kingdom (Luke 1:32–33).

The inspired writer referred to “the church of the firstborn” (Heb. 12:23), then in the same context alluded to the church as “a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (v. 28). When the Lord comes and raises the dead, “Then cometh the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father” (1 Cor. 15:24). Again, after the resurrection, the Lord’s people (i.e., His kingdom) will “be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 The. 4:17). Just as Christ is head of His church, so is He also the Savior of it (Eph. 5:23). This promise is not to save His people from the normal problems, toils, and tears of this life, but to save them eternally.

The church/kingdom of Christ is the only institution of any kind on earth that will not eventually perish, whether from inner corruption, financial failure, destruction by enemies, death, or due to the destruction of all things at the end. “The kingdoms of earth pass away one by one, but the kingdom of heaven remains!” When the Lord comes, “then cometh the end” (1 Cor. 15:24) when “the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10). Jesus warned specifically of humanly created religious institutions: “Every plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up” (Mat. 15:13).

The Lord’s kingdom is built upon two solid rocks. **First**, it is built upon the Deity and Sonship of Christ Himself: “Upon this rock I will build my church,” He declared (Mat. 16:18; cf. 21:42; Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6–7). **Second**, like the house of the wise man, it is build upon the solid rock of the Word of Christ (Mat. 7:24–25). As long as it remains upon these

immovable foundations its destiny is secure. However, when it strays from them (and to leave one is to abandon both), it becomes merely a human institution, the destiny of which is destruction and damnation rather than salvation. Nothing but the kingdom of Christ has an eternal destiny with God, promised and secured by God. This fact alone demonstrates the incomprehensible value of the kingdom.

The value of the kingdom of Heaven is intrinsic. Its worth abides and remains regardless of what men may think of it. Many would not recognize a treasure or a pearl if they saw it. I have read of the way a certain nineteenth-century Pennsylvania farmer complained of the messy black scum that constantly polluted the streams on his land, making them unfit for his cattle. None wanted to buy his land because of the pollution, so he sold it far at below market price. The “messy black scum” turned out to be oil seeping to the surface, and the first oil well was drilled on what had been his property. He had this immensely valuable treasure all about him, but he did not perceive its value. The oil was nonetheless valuable, however, even if he and many others failed to recognize it.

So it is with the kingdom. Many have grown up hearing the Gospel, but have never obeyed it. In other cases, many godly parents who loved and valued the kingdom reared their children in the Lord’s Way. These children were taught properly, and they obeyed the Gospel, but upon going out on their own they sacrificed the kingdom for the trinkets of the world and the errors of men. Others by the millions believe sincerely that they are in the kingdom, but they have been so confused by human doctrines that they have accepted only a cheap counterfeit religion rather than the real kingdom. Most men value the church of the Lord little or not at all, and it will always be this way, according to the Lord (Mat. 7:13–14). In fact, in this age of warped thinking and cultural abnormalities, more and more people seem to think of the Lord’s kingdom and the Bible as sources of harm and danger in the world. None of the wrong attitudes about the kingdom and its incalculable value decrease its worth at all, nor would it even if all men should reject it.

### **Application Number Two: The Kingdom Is Entered Only By Sacrifice**

This principle is unmistakable and unavoidable in these parables. The men in both parables sold all that they had in order to secure their respective treasures. We cannot help contrasting the “rich young ruler” with these men. In answer to his question about obtaining eternal life, Jesus told him that he must sell his possessions and give to the poor, then follow Him (Mat. 19:21). He was unwilling to do what the men in the parables did (v. 22).

Time after time the Lord and His inspired writers challenge us with the message that we must be willing to give up whatever prevents us from laying hold on and faithfully serving in the kingdom with its hope of eternal life. As prevalent as this teaching is, it is fearful to contemplate how few even in the kingdom—much less those in the world—comprehend it. Consider a few key, representative statements:

Jesus urged in the Sermon on the Mount: “But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mat. 6:33). He plainly declared that those who would be His disciples must make sacrifices: “And he said unto all, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

Paul provided a powerful example of “selling all that he had” for the kingdom when he was converted:

Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ (Phi. 3:7–8).

He urged those who are already in the kingdom to live sacrificial and holy lives, in order to be acceptable to God (Rom. 12:1-2).

What sorts of sacrifices does the Bible challenge us to make for the sake of the kingdom?

1. Human traditions and doctrines, which produce vain worship (Mat. 15:6–9).
2. Kindred who reject us if we obey the Gospel (Mat. 10:34–37).
3. Material possessions, if they are more important than following Christ (Mat. 19:21–22).
4. Career and reputation that contradict entering and serving in the kingdom (Phi. 3:5–7).
5. Suffering persecution, even dying, may be necessary (1 Pet. 3:14–17; 4:16–19; Rev. 2:10).

Jesus summarized this doctrine for us: One must be willing to lose his life (sacrifice whatever is necessary, even life itself) in order to save it by “buying” the kingdom (Luke 9:24). The thief must quit stealing. The filthy-tongued must cease his profanity. Adulterers and fornicators must give up their immorality. The drunkard and illicit-drug user must cast these aside. The lazy person must arise from his bed of indolence. One in religious error must leave behind his false doctrines and practices.

Without controversy, this teaching is challenging, hard, drastic—even radical in a believe-anything/believe-nothing world. Yet, also without controversy, Jesus thus

unapologetically and repeatedly challenged men so to think and behave. None ever followed Him without knowing the cost of discipleship and without being urged to count the cost of it.

For lack of emphasis on this disturbing (but fundamentally necessary) teaching, millions have been enticed by the Billy Grahams, Max Lucados, and Joel Osteens to make a shallow, emotional profession of discipleship. These folk know little or nothing of the Truth about the plan of salvation, the nature of the kingdom/church, true worship, or even Biblical morality. They, whether through ignorance or purpose, make no connection between love and obedience (John 14:15; et al.), faith and works (Gal. 5:6; Jas. 2:17–24; et al.), and baptism, salvation, and entering the kingdom (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, 41, 47; et al.).

Likewise, tens of thousands of those who have their names on the rolls of churches of Christ have never risen above the convenience level in their religion. Many of these are “doctrinally” conservative. However, they find it more convenient to stay home on Sunday nights, Wednesday nights, and during Gospel meetings than to assemble with the saints. It is more convenient to give \$10.00 per week than \$100.00. It is more convenient to remain silent than to try to teach their friends the Gospel. It would be inconvenient (and a bit painful) to refuse to make the moral compromises at work that would guarantee a raise in pay or a promotion. Perhaps ten percent of the members do the great majority of the work in most local churches because the ninety percent are unwilling to sacrifice anything for the kingdom.

The root problem of the liberal element in the church (if we can admit that they are still in it) is unwillingness to pay the price to be the Lord’s true people. They want the crown with no cross, the blessings without the bother, of the exclusive kingdom. Unwilling to be bound by the Law of Christ, liberals have substituted their own ooey-goey, touchy-feely, sentimental definition of the meaning of loving Christ. They reason that the Lord would not want a man to remain unmarried although he divorced his first wife because she snored loudly. They would never leave the intolerant impression that the church of Christ is the only one Jesus built and will save eternally. Surely, the God of grace does not consider instrumental music a Heaven-or-Hell issue.

Repentance is the Scripturally specified point at which kingdom-buying life-changes take place. In repentance, one first decides to sell all and buy—to cast aside things that offend God and that are incompatible with the kingdom of Christ. Then, repentance is perfected when one alters his behavior to reflect his decision to do so. Repentance is therefore the crux of real conversion (transformation, change, rebirth), the step in which one pays whatever price he must respectively pay to “obtain” the kingdom treasure. This price includes baptism unto the

remission of sins for every accountable person who has lived since the cross (Mark 16:16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38; et al.). We should therefore not be amazed that *repent or perish* (Luke 13:3) is a constant theme of the New Testament, yea, of the entire Bible (Acts 17:30). The message of these two parables (indeed of the New Testament) is that there is no price too great to pay for the treasure of the kingdom!

### **Application Number Three:**

#### **When Wise Men See The Kingdom's Value They Willingly Sell All To Have It**

Both parables depict the men in them as willingly, without hesitation, disposing of their assets to obtain the treasure they found. In their case, this was necessary to gather the funds required in exchange for the treasure. In our case, however, though we possessed the wealth of the entire world, we could not purchase membership in the kingdom. The Lord paid that price for us, which no man could ever pay. However, the principle that we must “pay the price”—surrender whatever would separate us from Christ, as those men had to surrender all they had—applies fully to all men since Calvary. *Grace only* apart from man's obedience to the Gospel is a man-made fantasy.

The man who found the treasure was so happy over his discovery that “in his joy” he sold his other goods. Although not stated, we may fairly infer the same of the pearl merchant—he wasted no time, but immediately gathered all of his assets with which to purchase the priceless pearl. Contrast again the behaviors and attitudes of these men with those of the rich young ruler earlier noted. Significantly, Matthew says that when Jesus told him to sell his possessions, give to the poor, and follow Him, that “he went away sorrowful,” unwilling to pay the “price” of eternal life (Mat. 19:22),

Did either man in these parables wring his hands, quibble over the price, or grieve over his “sacrifices”? Not for one moment! Both men perceived that the value of their purchases far outweighed the respective prices they were paying. They knew that, even in giving all that they had for these treasures, they were still getting a bargain and that they would eventually reap a huge profit.

I have already established the value of the kingdom. Those who have sufficient wisdom to understand its value never argue or quibble over the price to obtain it. Some want to steal salvation and the kingdom by offering nothing in exchange for it. Dyed-in-the-wool Calvinists, Universalists, and certain ones of our brethren tinged with a bit of both of these errors, tell us that we can do nothing toward our own salvation—it is all up to God. We say to them: **Read these parables!** Some are willing to pay something to obtain the kingdom, if they can name

their own price. Many are willing to believe intellectually in and confess the Deity claims of Christ. However, when it comes to repentance, they start haggling over the price. Those unscripturally married—thus living in adultery—are seldom willing to give up an ineligible spouse for the kingdom. Rather, they devise ingenious “explanations” of Matthew 19:9 and 1 Corinthians 7.

Very few of these “believers” are willing to be baptized as part of the “price.” (In fact, they argue that to require baptism is an attempt to actually purchase/earn salvation by a work of human effort or merit. This is absolutely not the case, as many passages indicate [e.g., Tit. 3:5].) Yet, the Pentecostians rebuke sharply the attitude of all who argue that baptism is not essential to salvation. When Peter told them to repent and be baptized unto the remission of their sins, rather than argue and quibble, they “gladly received his word” and “were baptized” (Acts 2:38, 41, KJV). When one argues over baptism (or any other requirement of the Lord) he has not “gladly received the word.” Likewise, when one correctly values his soul and the kingdom, he will never argue about the necessity of baptism or any other of the Lord’s requirements.

Let us now give more attention to the attitude of joy that characterized the treasure-buyers, and which typifies true spiritual treasure-hunters. We have just seen this spirit in the three thousand sinners on Pentecost whose grievous guilt Peter’s sermon had made them to feel. They were glad to find that forgiveness was possible and eagerly hastened to acquire it. Paul realized that the things in the world—which he once considered profitable—were not at all, compared to gaining Christ (Phi. 3:7–8). Although he suffered all manner of persecution for the kingdom, he never once expressed regret for doing so. John reminds us: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3).

Those who have to be sort of “slipped up on” or “dragged” into the kingdom benefit neither themselves nor the kingdom. The “quickie” teaching process that led them to the water did little more than get them wet. Such have not repented. Their hearts are still in the world, and merely ducking them in water does not change the heart or practice. Only repentance does so. Thus, many have been added to congregational rolls in recent years who were not taught the most fundamental truths about the church and the scheme of redemption. They never understood or accepted the difference between New Testament Christianity and denominationalism and were never converted from their errors. Now many of those people are Bible school teachers, and not a few of them have been appointed as elders and deacons. This phenomenon explains some of the dire apostasy in our ranks.

The men in the parable did not have to be forced or begged to purchase their respective treasures. They did not hesitate for one moment. It was the only sensible and wise thing to do. They did not go home, wishing they had the treasures, but doing nothing to get them (as do some who admire Jesus from a distance, wishing they had His blessings, but refusing to do what is necessary to receive them). Neither did these men denigrate the value of the kingdom. These men did not wait for the price to go down, as some seem to do who think that later in life it will be easier to follow Jesus and serve in His kingdom.

## Conclusion

When the pearl merchant found the object of his quest, all he said was, “How much?” He was not surprised to learn that the price was great indeed! However, this pearl was the object of his life, and his life would have been empty and vain had he not bought it. What did it matter that he had to give all he owned to have it?

After the church was established and the Gospel began to be preached, when men of honest hearts came upon the Truth of the kingdom, and inquired and were told how they might partake of it, they responded in immediate obedience (Acts 2:37–41; 9:6–18; 22:16; 16:30–35). They realized the treasure that was before them and wisely invested in it immediately.

The Kingdom of Christ and the salvation in it are the treasure worth all—the pearl of great price. If we do not give all we have for it now, the time will come when—as certain as are God, His Son, and the Truth of Their Word—we will be willing to do so. How much better to give up all joyfully and enjoy the blessings of the kingdom now that we may do so forever!

May we who are in the kingdom ever realize its incomparable worth and love it and serve in it with all our being. Let us ever be alert for those who are searching for the priceless pearl, that we help them obtain it. Let us make the treasure of the kingdom visible and desirable even to those who are not looking for it, that they may discover it and want to make it their own.

## Endnotes

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1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
  2. The simile is signaled by the use of *as* or *like*, indicating a similarity between that which is being spoken and something else. The metaphor, on the other hand, bypasses *as* or *like* and simply says one thing **is** another (e.g., “This is my body” [Mat. 26:26]; “I am the door” [John 10:9]).

**[Note:** I wrote this MS for and presented a digest of it orally at the Power Lectures, hosted by the Southaven, MS, Church of Christ, August 13–17, 2000. It was published in the book of the lectures, *The Parables of Jesus*, ed. B.J. Clarke (Southaven, MS: Southaven Church of Christ, 1998).]

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