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Parables: Kingdom's Value, Growth and Influence

By Bryan Hodge

“Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.” ~ Mark 9:1

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” ~ Acts 1:8

“And they were filled with the Holy Spirit.” ~ Acts 2:4

“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the Kingdom of the Son of His love.” ~ Colossians 1:13 cf. Ephesians 5:5

“I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and Kingdom...” ~ Revelation 1:9

Let us consider four “kingdom” parables.

The Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44)

The setting (Matthew 13:1-2): Jesus is publicly teaching a great multitude at the Sea of Galilee.

The subject is the coming Kingdom (church). He presents eight parables. These parables may be broken into four couplets. Two have to do with the heart [The Four Soils (Matthew 13:3-9) and The Growing Seed (Mark 4:26-29)]. Two have to do with the value of the kingdom [The Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44) and The Pearl of Great Price (Matthew 13:45-46)]. Two have to do with the growth and influence of the kingdom [The Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32) and The Leaven (Matthew 13:33)]. Two concern the great parting to come [The Wheat and The Tares (Matthew 13:24-30) and The Dragnet (Matthew 13:47-50)].

The Parable (Matthew 13:44): A man finds treasure which had been hidden in a field. Note - in that day, houses were not very secure. They were easily broken into and burglarized. It was common to hide one's treasure by burying it some secret place. However, it was also possible that one could die with no one else knowing of the hidden treasure.

The man recognizes the value of his find. He sells all he has with joy in order to acquire the property rights to this field.

The application: (1) The value of the kingdom should be recognized. Jesus purchased it with His blood (Acts 20:28). (2) There is a price to be paid (cf. Luke 14:28-33). Wayne Jackson, “It will cost you time (Ephesians 5:16). It will cost you money (Matthew 10:8; 1 Corinthians 16:2). It may cost you family and friends (Matthew 10:34-39). It could cost you your life (Revelation 2:10).” (The Parables in Profile, p. 25). (3) It is worth the price. He paid the price with joy (cf. Philippians 3:7-8).

The Pearl of Great Price (Matthew 13:45-46)

The setting (Matthew 13:1-2): It is the same as the first parable.

The Parable (Matthew 13:45-46): A merchant is seeking beautiful pearls. Note – There may be a difference between this and the previous parable. This merchant was seeking. The man in the previous parable is not

said to have been seeking. He may have stumbled upon the treasure. Some accidentally stumble upon religious truth (e.g. the woman at the well, John 4). Others are actively seeking (e.g. Nicodemus, John 3).

The merchant finds an exceptional pearl. He recognizes the value. He sells all that he has to acquire this pearl.

Two observations: (1) The pearl is unique among the “gemstones” in that it is the product of a living organism. It is produced by conflict. “Pearls are formed inside the shell of certain mollusks as a defense mechanism against a potentially threatening irritant such as a parasite inside the shell, or an attack from outside injuring the mantle issue. The mollusk creates a pearl sac to seal off irritation... The mantle of the mollusk deposits layers of calcium carbonate in the form of the mineral aragonite or a mixture of aragonite and calcite... held together by an organic horn-like compound called conchiolin... the commonly held belief that sand acts as an irritant is in fact rarely the case. Typical stimuli include organic material, parasites, or even damage that displaces mantle tissue” (Wikipedia). The kingdom was produced by a living being who went through conflict (cf. Acts 20:28). (2) It is the only gemstone that cannot be improved by man. Other gemstones are cut and polished to bring out their beauty. Man can damage it, but not improve it.

The application: (1) The value should be recognized. God’s truth is more valuable than gold or silver (Psalm 19:10; 119:72, 127). (2) We should be willing to pay the price. “Buy the truth, and do not sell it” (Proverbs 23:23). (3) We should be willing to give up whatever it costs. Paul said, “What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ... I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him...” (Philippians 3:7-9).

The Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32)

The setting (Matthew 13:1-2): It is the same as the first parable.

The parable (Matthew 13:31-32): The parable concerns the growth of the mustard seed. A mustard seed is small. It is not technically the smallest seed, but “it was the smallest of all agricultural seeds in Palestine” (ESV Study Bible). A mustard seed is typically one or two millimeters in diameter (Wikipedia). Yet from this small beginning can grow a bush as large as 3 by 12 feet (ESV Study Bible, Mark 4). It grows large enough for birds to nest in its branches.

The application: The kingdom in preparation must have appeared small and insignificant to some. Jesus was born to poor parents and placed in a borrowed manger (Luke 2). He preached from a borrowed boat (Mark 3; Luke 5). He borrowed loaves and fish to feed the multitude (John 6). He rode into Jerusalem upon a borrowed donkey (Matthew 21; Mark 11; Luke 19). He was buried in a borrowed tomb (Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19). He had no army or navy. About a hundred and twenty disciples gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 1:15). Yet from this would come thousands of believers (Acts 2:41; 2:47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31; 11:21; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 21:20). Multitudes stood ready to die, if need be, for Him. His message would spread into all the world (Colossians 1:6; 1:23; Romans 1:8; 16:26). Think of Napoleon’s words, upon “Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I myself have founded great empires; Jesus alone founded His empire upon love, and to this day millions would die for Him. I think I understand something of human nature... I am a man... Jesus Christ was more than a man.”

The Leaven (Matthew 13:33)

The Setting (Matthew 13:1-2): It is the same as the first parable.

The parable (Matthew 13:33): A woman places a small amount of leaven in three measures of meal (ESV Study Bible, 39 liters of flour). The small amount of leaven has an effect on the whole. Note – One teaspoon of yeast is sufficient for twenty ounces of flour (Smithsonianmag.com, a ratio of 120 to 1).

The application: While it is true that leaven sometimes symbolizes a negative influence (Matthew 16:6; 1 Corinthians 5:6-7), it is not always used with negative connotations (Leviticus 7:13; 23:17). In this parable leaven is being used of the influence of God's message (the seed of the Kingdom, Luke 8:11) and the Kingdom's influence in the world.

Consider the following thoughts: (1) Leaven is active. So should be every Christian (Acts 8:4; Titus 2:14; 3:1; 3:8; 3:14). (2) Leaven influences what it contacts. We should seek to be a godly influence in this world (Matthew 5:13-16).

Think of the influence God's word has had in society. (1) The Bible's influence is seen in the words we use. I have heard men use in everyday speech "the golden rule" (cf. Matthew 7:12), "A house divided against itself" (no Abraham Lincoln did not originate this saying of Matthew 12:25), "The hand writing on the wall" (cf. Daniel 5), "by the skin of the teeth" (cf. Job 19:20), "A fly in the ointment" (cf. Ecclesiastes 10:1), "A labor of love" (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:3; Hebrews 6:10), "A leopard cannot change its spots" (cf. Jeremiah 10:23), "A wolf in sheep's clothing" (cf. Matthew 7:15), "You reap what you sow" (cf. Hosea 8:7; Galatians 6:7), "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" (cf. John 8:1-ff), "A drop in the bucket" (cf. Isaiah 40:15), "In the twinkling of an eye" (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:52), "Go the extra mile" (cf. Matthew 5:41), "The blind leading the blind" (Matthew 15:13-14), "The apple of the eye" (cf. Deuteronomy 32:10; Psalms 17:8; Proverb 7:2; Lamentations 2:18; Zachariah 2:8), "Do not cast your pearls before the swine" (cf. Matthew 7:6), "My thorn in the flesh" (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:7), "Brother's keeper" (cf. Genesis 3:9). All of these are from the Bible. Its influence is far greater than most realize.

David Barton has remarked, "The three men quoted most often by the founders (of America) were Montesquieu, Blackstone, and Locke. Yet, there was a source the Founders cited four times more often than either Montesquieu, or Blackstone, and twelve times more often than Locke. What was that source? The Bible! The Bible accounted for 34% of all the founder's quotes (The Myth of Separation, p. 201).