

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have the opportunity to learn how to understand and teach the parables of Jesus Christ. By using *the guidelines for interpreting parables*, two teachers will study **the parable of the hidden treasure** in Matthew 13:44 and **the parable of the pearl of great value** in Matthew 13:45-46. These are parables concerning THE COST OF ENTERING GOD'S KINGDOM. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme.

A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a true-to-life story or illustration designed to teach a spiritual truth. Jesus used the commonplace and the events of everyday to illumine the mysteries of the kingdom of God and to confront people with the reality of their situation and their need for renewal.

Let me read Matthew 13:44-46. "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

(S) **POINT 1. UNDERSTAND THE NATURAL STORY OF THE PARABLE.**

The parable is told in figurative language and the spiritual meaning of the parable is based on that. Therefore we will first study the words and the cultural and historical facts of the background of the story.

Let us take turns to explain the true-to-life elements of the stories of these two parables.

The first picture is of a man who, while digging in a field, *unexpectedly* came upon a treasure hidden in the ground. The story does not tell us who buried the treasure or why it was buried there. But due to wars and burglars, people often did not have a secure place to store their valuables. So someone would at times put a part or all his precious possessions in a chest and bury them somewhere in his field. This particular person may have died before informing anyone about his treasure.

Someone else now owned the field. The digger unexpectedly found this treasure. The story does not tell us why he was digging in a field that did not belong to him. One possibility was that he rented that field as a share-cropper.

The man did not want to steal the treasure. He realised that in order to claim legal ownership of the treasure, he must first of all own the field. So, he covered the treasure up again. He went and sold everything he possessed in order to buy that field. Not in the least did he mind the great cost involved, so delighted was he to obtain possession of the treasure.

(T) The second picture is of a whole-sale merchant seeking for the very best pearl. Pearls were a precious possession. Only the very rich people could afford to buy them. Especially the pearls that came from the Persian Gulf or from the Indian Ocean were fabulously priced, far beyond the purchasing power of the average person. This whole-sale merchant was dissatisfied with the pearls he had been able to obtain up to the present. So he searched everywhere for the very best pearl. Finally his search was successful. He found one pearl of very great value. The merchant wanted this pearl. So he bought it. But in order to do this, he had to sell all his possessions.

(S) **POINT 2. EXAMINE THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT AND DETERMINE THE ELEMENTS OF THE PARABLE.**

The context of the parable may consist of *the setting* and *the explanation or application* of the parable. The setting of the parable may state *the occasion* for telling the parable, or describe *the circumstances* at the time of telling the parable. The setting is usually found *before* the parable and the explanation or application is usually found *after* the parable.

(T) In the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value, *the setting* is contained in Matthew 13:3-43 immediately after Jesus' explanation of the parable of the weeds among the wheat. Therefore these two parables were not spoken to the crowds, but only to the disciples of Jesus. The purpose of these two parables was to reveal and not to conceal!

The stories of these two parables are contained in Matthew 13:44-46.

The explanation or application of these two parables is not given by Jesus. The parables must therefore be interpreted from the stories themselves and their context.

(S) **POINT 3. IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT AND IRRELEVANT DETAILS OF THE PARABLE.**

Jesus Christ did not intend every detail in the parable to have some spiritual significance. The relevant details are those details in the story of the parable that reinforce the message of the parable. Therefore, we should not ascribe independent spiritual significance to every detail of the parable. Let us take turns to describe which of the details in these parables are really essential or relevant.

(T) The treasure is the essential detail in the parable of the hidden treasure, because it represents *the kingdom of God and its incalculable value*.

(S) The field. Some interpreters say that the field represents *the Bible*, but this cannot be the case, for reading the Bible is not the only way of discovering the kingdom of God! For example, the apostle Paul was not reading the Bible when he found the kingdom of God. When God leads a sinner to the discovery of the kingdom of God or salvation, he employs all kinds of ways and methods. Therefore, *the field* is only a part of the story and this detail should not be given any particular meaning.

(T) The merchant seeking the pearl is the essential detail in the parable of the pearl of great value, because he represents the person diligently seeking *the kingdom of God*. He represents any person who is seeking diligently for the highest good in life and when he has found it, is willing to surrender everything he has in order to obtain it.

(S) The pearl represents the kingdom of God and its incalculable value. It is a relevant detail. Pearls representing something very valuable are also mentioned in other Bible passages: For example, in Matthew 7:6, Jesus warns his hearers not to throw their pearls to pigs, because if they do, the pigs would trample the pearls under their feet and then turn and tear them to pieces. There *pearls* represent *whatever is holy*. For example, Jesus warns his hearers not to throw *the pearl of proclaiming the gospel* to people who persist in rejecting their preaching (Matthew 10:14-15,23). And in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Paul warns against throwing *the pearl of being an elder* to Christians who are not qualified.

(T) **POINT 4. IDENTIFY THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE PARABLE.**

The main message of the parable is found either in the explanation or application or from the story itself. From the way Jesus Christ himself explained or applied the parables, we know how we should interpret parables. A parable normally has only one main lesson or message, one central point to make. Therefore, we should not try to find a spiritual truth in every detail of the story, but instead look for the main message of the story.

The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value teach about "*the cost of entering God's kingdom*".

The main message of the parable of the hidden treasure is the following. "God's kingdom is so precious a treasure that a person, who obtains it without searching for it, is willing to surrender for it whatever could interfere with obtaining it." The value of entering God's kingdom is worth every sacrifice. The treasure in the field is far more worth than the price paid for the field. Obtaining or entering God's kingdom is far more valuable than anything one possesses.

(S) The main message of the parable of the pearl of great value is the following. "God's kingdom is so precious a possession that a person, who obtains it after diligently searching for it, is willing to surrender for it whatever may be inconsistent with it." The value of entering God's kingdom is worth every sacrifice. The pearl of great value is worth far more than everything the merchant possesses.

(T) *Entering God's kingdom* is a basic characteristic of the teaching of Jesus about the kingdom of God. Entering God's kingdom is absolutely essential for salvation. The people of God's kingdom give up whatever is necessary in order to surrender themselves and their lives to Jesus Christ and thus enter God's kingdom.

God's kingdom is the kingship or reign of God in the heart and life of a Christian. It is the open acknowledgement of the supremacy of God in one's heart and life. It includes especially the complete salvation of one's spirit and eventually of one's body. It expresses itself in one's active membership of the Church and in all the great privileges of thereby being made a blessing to others to the glory of God. Finally, it includes one's participation in the new heaven and new earth after the second coming of Jesus Christ.

(S) How does a person enter God's kingdom? Mark 10:24-26 says that *entering God's kingdom* means to be saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved (Acts 16:31), that is, you will enter God's kingdom.

(T) POINT 5. COMPARE THE PARABLE WITH PARALLEL AND CONTRASTING PASSAGES.

Some parables are similar to one another and can be compared. The truth in all the parables also has parallel or contrasting truth taught in other passages of the Bible. Try to find the most important cross-references that help us to interpret the parable. Always check the interpretation of a parable with the direct and clear teaching of the Bible.

(S) I will compare some Bible passages with the parable of the hidden treasure:

In John chapter 1, we read about how Nathanael discovered the treasure of God's kingdom when Philip told him that they had found the Messiah. First, Nathanael was sceptical and doubtful and did not think that anything good could come from Galilee. Philip challenged him "to come and see". When Jesus told Nathanael that he had been sitting under a fig tree before Philip called him, he realised that Jesus was the Messiah. In order to obtain the treasure of God's kingdom, he *surrendered his scepticism and doubts* and believed in Jesus Christ. That was the cost of entering God's kingdom for Nathanael.

In John chapter 4, we read about how the Samaritan woman discovered the treasure of God's kingdom when Jesus met her at the well. First, she avoided the truth about her sinful life by changing the subject of discussion. But when Jesus told her that he was the Messiah, she could no longer flee away from her real sinful life. In order to obtain the treasure of God's kingdom, she *surrendered her fear of being discovered and her shame for her past sins* and she believed in Jesus Christ. That was the cost of entering God's kingdom for the Samaritan woman.

In Acts chapter 9 and Philippians chapter 3, we read about how the apostle Paul discovered the treasure of God's kingdom when Jesus met him personally on the way to Damascus. First, Paul persecuted Christians by putting them into prison or by casting his vote to put them to death. But when he met Jesus Christ, he realised that he himself was a wicked sinner and that Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah and Saviour of the world. In order to obtain the treasure of God's kingdom, he was *willing to immediately surrender his high position in Israel as a Pharisee and probably as a member of the Sanhedrin* and to believe in Jesus Christ. He stopped his persecution, took the side of Jesus Christ and preached the gospel to his own people and to many others. That was the cost of entering God's kingdom for Paul.

(T) I will compare some Bible passages with the parable of the pearl of great value:

In Acts chapter 8, we read how the Ethiopian official had a long, difficult and dangerous journey to Jerusalem to worship the living God. He discovered the most precious pearl of God's kingdom after diligently searching for it in the Bible. He was reading in Isaiah 53, and when Philip began with that passage of Scripture to tell him the good news about Jesus, he believed. This government official was *willing to risk his high position as a political leader* in order to be a follower of Jesus Christ. That was the cost of entering God's kingdom for him.

In Acts chapter 10, we read how the military officer, Cornelius, discovered the most precious pearl of God's kingdom after diligently searching for it in his practical worship of God. He was very religious and often prayed and gave gifts to the poor. But when Peter preached the gospel to him, his relatives and his close friends in his house, his spiritual eyes opened and he believed. This military official was *willing to risk his high position as a military leader* in order to be a follower of Jesus Christ. That was the cost of entering God's kingdom for him.

In Acts chapter 16, we read how the woman Lydia, the dealer in purple cloth, discovered the most precious pearl of God's kingdom after diligently searching for it in her worship of God. She was sitting at the place of prayer at the river outside the city when Paul and his companions began to speak to her and the other women gathered there. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. This merchant woman was *willing to risk her trade and business* in order to be a follower of Jesus Christ. That was the cost of entering God's kingdom for her.

In Acts chapter 17, we read how the Bereans discovered the most precious pearl of God's kingdom after diligently searching for it in their discussions around the Bible. Paul had preached the word of God to them and afterwards they had examined the Scriptures every day for several days to see if what Paul said was true. When they discovered that it was true, they believed. These Jews and Gentiles, both men and women, *risked suffering the persecution by their fellow-countrymen* in order to be followers of Jesus Christ. That was the cost of entering God's kingdom for them.

However, in Mark chapter 10, we read how a rich young man was *unwilling to give up his great wealth* in order to become a disciple of Christ. And Christ then said, "How hard is it for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

(S) POINT 6. SUMMARISE THE MAIN TEACHINGS OF THE PARABLE.

Let us take turns to summarise the main teachings or messages of the parables about the cost of entering God's kingdom.

The main message of these parables about *the cost of entering God's kingdom* is that "God's kingdom is so precious a treasure that a person who obtains it is *willing to surrender for it whatever could interfere with obtaining it.*" The cost

of entering God's kingdom is to be willing to surrender whatever might stand in the way of obtaining it. Things that might stand in the way of entering God's kingdom, may be one's pride, ambitions, possessions, relationships, activities or even religion. If any of these things stand in the way of entering God's kingdom, then these must be given up! Entering God's kingdom is not simply an easy or cheap matter. *What cost God the life of his only Son, Jesus Christ, can never be a cheap matter for people who want to enter God's kingdom!*

(T) Discovering and obtaining or entering God's kingdom is what matters the most in life. Matthew 6:33 says that seeking God's kingdom is the highest priority for man. There is a difference of emphasis between these two parables: The parable of the hidden treasure emphasises the incalculable preciousness of salvation for those who discover it and obtain possession of it *without even looking for it!* And the parable of the pearl of great value emphasises the incalculable value of salvation for those who discover it and obtain possession of it *after searching for it!* No matter if one discovers God's kingdom or salvation unexpectedly or after searching for it diligently, the important thing is *to receive it!* If you have not yet discovered God's kingdom, start searching for it now! If you have been searching for God's kingdom a long time, enter it now! Believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved! The kingdom of God is worth more than anything you possess or do. The people who know where the treasure lies, joyfully abandon everything else to secure it.

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Preach, teach or study this parable together with another person or group of people. Next week we will study the parable of the wedding banquet. As preparation, please read Matthew 22:1-14.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom and www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".