

Finders Keepers

The Gospels

Matthew 13:31-50

Introduction

The apostle Paul told young Timothy, who pastored a church, to do the work of an evangelist. I believe the passages of scripture that we will study today, will allow me to do this as well.

We will complete our study of the parables of the kingdom in Matthew chapter 13 today. These parables make it very clear that we must come to the point and the place in our lives at which we personally choose Jesus Christ. We are either part of the kingdom or we are not – and the choice is ours alone to make.

You may remember that in a previous discussion, I used two trees in an attempt to illustrate the two Advents of Jesus Christ.

- The first tree represented the First Advent of Christ; that is, His coming as a babe in Bethlehem. This was His first coming to planet earth, which is referred to as His First Advent.
- The second tree illustrated the Second Advent; that is, when Jesus Christ returns after the Tribulation period to set up the literal Millennial Kingdom. This is called His Second Advent.

The question that we would ask is, “What happens between the two Advents? What occurs on planet earth after Jesus Christ has gone back to heaven and before He comes back to earth?”

Matthew chapter 13 answers this. We will take a look at the final parables of the kingdom and will look at them in sets of pairs.

Developments within the Kingdom

The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven illustrate the growth within the kingdom or developments within the kingdom. The first parable of the mustard seed is positive. The second parable of the leaven is negative.

The Mustard Seed

Look at Matthew 13:31-32 for the parable of the mustard seed.

He presented another parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field;

“and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

Now, before we go any further, Jesus does not compare this seed to all the seeds in existence. Those who believe there are errors in scripture run quickly to this.

However, notice the key words, “smaller than,” and “the garden plants”. The mustard seed was the smallest of the garden plants during the days of Jesus Christ. It was black and about the size of a pinhead.

The point is that Jesus Christ says, “Something as insignificant as a little black seed will one day mushroom to become the largest of the garden plants.”

This is the known garden plants in that day.

In other words, the kingdom has insignificant beginnings. It is very small and insignificant. However, over a course of time, it becomes a significant power and force in the world.

I think this is a good illustration because Jesus is saying that He does not need the spectacular; He does not need the mighty to build His kingdom. Jesus, after His ascension, does not need all that we would think to establish His kingdom before He comes back.

Look, in fact, at the way Jesus came the first time – as a babe in Bethlehem, lying on a feed trough – this was the King of the kingdom. He would be rejected and a parenthesis would be built around the future Millennial Kingdom. However, He would grow up and would solicit those who would become part of His band. Who does He choose? He chooses twelve *very*

ordinary people, who were rather insignificant in terms of building the kingdom of heaven.

Something insignificant can become significant. It is not the mighty that move in this kingdom age. It is not those who would gain all of the attention. It is people who are *very* ordinary. I am glad of this because that includes people like you and me.

Lord Kelvin, a British scientist, one day experimented in his laboratory. He took a huge piece of metal – a metal sheet weighing several hundred pounds – and suspended it from the ceiling in his laboratory by a single chain. He took a piece of paper and wadded pieces of the paper into small pea-size balls. He stepped back and rhythmically threw a little piece of paper at the gigantic piece of metal. Nothing happened. He began throwing more small pieces of paper, and kept time as he did so. He threw one tiny paper ball after another. It was not long before that huge sheet of metal was swaying rhythmically back and forth.

This is the point of the parable – something insignificant can have very significant results. This is the positive, good growth or development within the kingdom.

Significant things are happening, *but*, Jesus says, “Evil is growing as well.”

The Leaven

Look at Matthew 13:33 where the next parable, the parable of the leaven, begins.

He spoke another parable to them, “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.”

Three pecks, or measures, would equal about a bushel.

We would need to interpret this parable by understanding the figures of speech in scripture and interpreting them accordingly. In order to understand the meaning of leaven, we need to go back through scripture and discover the way it is used symbolically.

Leaven is consistently used in scripture to symbolically represent evil.

Paul talks about,

. . . the leaven of malice . . .
(I Corinthians 5:8)

Jesus talks about,

. . . the leaven of the Pharisees . . .
(Luke 12:1)

He is referring to hypocrisy and self-righteousness in this verse.

In the Old Testament, before the Passover when God would, in effect, forgive the sins of the nation, the Israelites had a job to do. They had to go through their home, look between the cracks of the floor in every room, find any leaven, get it out of the house, and burn it because it represented sin and evil.

In this Matthew verse, a woman takes the leaven. The woman could be a reference to Jezebel in Revelation 2:20, who sows subversive doctrine within the kingdom. The leaven cannot be part of the kingdom because it is evil, but it will occur.

Going back in church history, which is one of my loves, we can discover that even before the location of the tomb of Jesus was forgotten; even before the clouds had moved back into place after He had split them, there was subversive doctrine being sowed in the early church.

The Ebionites, for example, came along soon after Christ’s ascension. They believed that keeping the Mosaic Law was essential to salvation. As a result, they would later discard Paul’s epistles because Paul taught justification by faith alone and that did not fit their doctrine.

The Gnostics were in existence during the time of Christ. They believed that God, who is pure, could in no way or fashion become a personal God robed in flesh. This could not be true. They did not believe in a personal, caring, intimate God.

I came across the Elkasites who existed during the second century. They believed that a book fell from heaven in 110 AD. This book taught that Jesus was an angel in the form of a man who attained deity at His baptism. Baptism then, would have some magical advocacy so that one would need to be baptized to be saved. This, by the way, church historians believe, provided the foundation for many errors, and primarily, the foundation for the Islam religion.

Perhaps Jesus, as He gave this parable, was thinking in His mind of two women – Priscilla and her cohort Maximillia – who appeared on the scene not long after His ascension. They believed that they were enlightened by the Holy Spirit and divinely commissioned to proclaim the setting up of the kingdom of Christ on earth. They had visions that they believed were infallible. In fact, they would

begin the thought that is found throughout church history that an experience or a vision from God is more authoritative than the word of God. These women were the first to distinguish between mortal and venial sin. In fact, they came up with the names. Mortal sins were unforgivable, while venial sins were forgivable.

We can see that even back in this time and throughout church history, or the kingdom age that incorporates the church, there is heresy; there is the infiltration of leaven. There is the doctrine that says, "Jesus Christ is not deity. He may have attained Godhood." Even back in this time, there was an attack on the authority of scripture that promoted the thought that visions or other experiences could supersede the authority of God's written word. There was also, even then, the declaration that salvation was by something else or by something in addition to Jesus Christ.

Truths about Developments within the Kingdom

Let me give two applications that I think would have been Jesus' applications from these two parables.

1. First, the most effective work on earth may never have the most significant press.

The church, in the press, will be criticized, misquoted, or ignored.

We have had an interesting time in our church office recently. Our local newspaper carried a long article on our church and other churches in our community. The conclusion of this article, it seemed, was that the most important thing that a church could do was have a nice bathroom. It was interesting that our Associate Pastor was quoted and misquoted.

Why can the truth not get good press? It is not going to happen.

2. Secondly, the most effective work will always encounter a hostile power.

Christians are not insulated from the leaven. In fact, Peter exhorts us to think and to know what we believe, saying,

. . . [be] ready . . . to give an account for the hope that is in you . . . (I Peter 3:15)

We are not to be insulated or isolated. We are to be integrated and involved.

Discoveries of the Kingdom

Let us look at another twin set of parables that illustrate the discoveries of the kingdom.

The Treasure

Look at Matthew 13:44 for the parable of the treasure.

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

A man's treasures, in Christ's day, were often buried for the sake of security. There were no banks or depositories, so the people had to be their own bankers. There was no better place to hide a treasure than a hole in the ground that they covered up in the hope that no one saw them put it there.

However, due to the passage of time, invading armies, or other reasons, people would die, be taken into captivity, or whatever, and their treasures would be left buried. Buried treasure abounded in Palestine and there are some who, still today, look for treasures there within the earth.

Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived during the first century, wrote these words of the, "gold and silver and the rest of that precious furniture which the Jews had, and which the owners treasured up underground against the uncertain fortunes of war".

This is a literal occurrence that happened all of the time back then.

Now when we read this parable, we may ask, "Was this man honest?" For the sake of the man's integrity, at least, although it is not Christ's point, let me mention a couple of things.

- First, the man reported it and obviously, purchased it from the owner.

If the owner of the field was the owner of the treasure, he certainly would have taken the treasure before selling the field, right?

- Secondly, the man could have simply taken the treasure or used part of the treasure to buy the field, yet he does neither.

Perhaps the owner of the treasure was dead. The rabbis in Christ's day taught, "If a man finds money, it belongs to the finder."

This is similar to the old rhyme we hear today, “Finders keepers, losers weepers.”

This man made a fantastic discovery. We are not sure what he was doing when he found the treasure.

Perhaps the man was plowing. The donkey was pulling the plow and, all of a sudden, he heard the sound of metal. He stopped and dropped to his knees and began to dig with his hands. He saw the glint of metal and looked this way and looked that way to make certain that no one was looking. He began to dig even more furiously and pulled up a box and opened the lid. It cascaded with jewels.

What did the man do? He did exactly what you and I would – stuck the box back in the hole and covered it with dirt. He then went to the owner and said, “I want to buy your field. . . . It’s how much? Oh my goodness, that’s going to cost me everything I have. No problem.”

The man could afford to be generous. He bought the field.

This man’s friends probably thought he was a lunatic. They probably asked, “What in the world is he doing selling everything he has for this lump of earth?” However, they do not know what he has up his sleeve.

I can remember when I was in college and believed that this gal was the one I wanted to marry. I was from the old school that I do not think even exists any more, where before you proposed, you had the ring. When you asked her to marry you, if she said, “Yes,” you put that noose, I mean, that ring, immediately on her finger. Then, she could not look anywhere else! I also had another rule in my own life that if this ever happened, I wanted to own the ring before I gave it to her.

Marsha and I had been dating for a long time and finally, I felt I was in a position to convince her to marry me. I decided that I would purchase the ring. I was ready to go to the jewelry store, which is also part of the old school, to pick out the ring, with the thought, “What is she going to like?” I also, of course, wanted to get the biggest diamond that I possibly could. However, since I was a college student, it was not going to be very large.

I went to the jewelry store and made an honest deal with the jeweler. I said, “Look, this is the diamond I want. Will you hold it and let me make payments?”

I was going to school full time and involved in ministry at the time, which meant that I did not have many opportunities to make money. The diamond was not that expensive, but it was still a lot to me.

The jeweler agreed, so I began making payments without any interest. That was the deal.

I remember deciding I wanted to ask her to marry me on Thanksgiving Day, which would be a day I would never forget. We had already made plans to go to her home for the day, which was halfway through first semester. In the meantime, the money was coming in slowly but surely.

The day before Thanksgiving, I had the last odd job that would give me enough money to make the final payment on the ring. I could take it with me in my luggage and ask her to marry me at her house. On that day, the day before Thanksgiving, it rained. It was, in fact, pouring rain, and my job was to rake leaves for a lady with a huge yard. Imagine the shock on her face when I stood on her front porch with a rake in my hands, saying, “Ma’am, I’m here to rake your yard.”

She said, “Son, it’s raining.”

I replied, “I know, but I need to rake your yard.”

She, probably thinking I was absolutely out of my mind, said, “Well, okay.”

It was November! It was pouring down rain and it was freezing!

The woman would come to the door every once in a while, “Son, is there anything I can do for you?”

I would say, “No, Ma’am.”

I think what really threw her was that I was probably out there in that freezing rain raking and smiling at the same time. I was not thinking about the rain – I was thinking about proposing. How was I going to word the proposal? That is another story!

The point is that we will do nearly anything in our little world that we need to do to get what we consider valuable. We will stay up to one o’ clock, until the final bell – four hours of that stuff – to see which team won. Why? Because it is valuable for us to know who won, silly as that is. Is it any wonder that this man would give away everything he had?

Jesus Christ is saying, “The kingdom is so valuable that when you give everything away, you have not lost a thing – in fact, you have gained.”

The Pearl

Jesus continues to the next parable, which also speaks of a discovery, in the discovery of a pearl. Look at Matthew 13:45-46.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls,

and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

The first discovery of the treasure was a surprise. It would have been great to have been there to see that. This second discovery was sought after.

For those of you who are citizens of the kingdom, perhaps you came to the kingdom in one of these two ways.

You may be a thinker and wanted to study the Bible to see if it were indeed truth. In fact, I have talked to some who got a Bible and just began to read and then, prayed to a God they did not know, "Lord, show me the truth." You were a seeker.

Some of you were not even looking for the King. However, you overheard a conversation, or someone showed up at your house, or you listened to a tape and the King invaded your life.

A lady in our church told me of something that happened that has been very meaningful to me. I tell this to God's glory, not mine. She knew a GI who was preparing for active duty. He was a believer. She sent a tape of a sermon to him and God impressed his heart to put the tape in the tape recorder in his barracks and turn the volume up. All of the guys in the barracks were preparing for active duty. This young man, who was a clear testimony in his barracks, told this lady what happened next. As the sermon was preached, the guys began to gather around. Some of them began to weep. At the end, several of them knelt and invited Christ into their life. In America, they could have gone to any number of churches that taught the truth, but God took them all the way over to the Middle East. They were not looking for it, but all of the sudden, they heard it and the King invaded their lives.

The point is, not how you discovered the kingdom, but whether or not you have found it. Have you found the kingdom? Is it yours?

Truths about Discoveries of the Kingdom

Let me apply these parables in two ways.

1. First, kingdom citizenship is *not* an inheritance.

In other words, it must be individually transacted. We do not get the pearl because our parents have the pearl. We do not get the wealth because it has been in the family for generations.

2. Secondly, kingdom citizenship is not some additional treasure.

It is not Jesus plus. It is not, "I think I'll add Him to my life and it will sort of round me out and give me the religious implications that I need to be a well-rounded person. Besides, I am an American."

Jesus is also not an experiment. The kingdom is not for moderately interested people.

Herbert Thompson owned 180 newspapers and controlled 290 other companies. His personal wealth was worth more than \$300,000,000. On one occasion, someone asked him, "How much would you give, Thompson, to buy the *New York Time*?" The value exceeded his personal wealth, obviously. He replied, "I would mortgage my soul."

I do not mean to imply that the kingdom of heaven is for sale. It is not a sale – it is an exchange of our sin for Jesus' sinlessness; our self-righteousness for His righteousness – everything of ours for us to receive everything of Him.

Deceived Within the Kingdom

Let us continue to the next, and final, twin set of parables. We will call these the parables of the deceived within the kingdom. These are parables of those who move through time and are deceived into believing that redemption comes by association. These are people who are deceived into believing that they are all right because they resemble the righteous, when they are, in effect, only religious.

The Tares alongside the Wheat

The first of this set of parables is the tares alongside the wheat. Look at Matthew 13:24-25.

. . . The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.

But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat . . .

The original Greek word for "tares," lets us in on the fact that this was bearded darnel. In the early

stages this darnel, or this tare, perfectly resembled wheat. The difference between darnel and wheat could not be seen until they matured.

When the darnel matured, it still could not be pulled up because its roots were intertwined with the wheat. As a result, the owner of the field would have to go ahead and harvest, but distinguish the two on the threshing floor. He would hire a bevy of women to throw the grains on large metal trays and laboriously pick out the darnel. The darnel could be distinguished because it was slate gray.

It was very important to separate the darnel from the wheat because the darnel was poisonous. It would produce dizziness and sickness.

It was such a common threat in that day, for an enemy to sow darnel in a field that the Romans had codified into their law, the punishment for doing so. This is evidently what happened in this parable.

Skip to Matthew 13:30. The harvest in this parable represents judgment.

Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."

Now look at Matthew 13:37-39 for Jesus' explanation of the parable.

And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man,

"and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one;

"and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels."

Notice that the tares are the unbelievers; that is, they are counterfeit believers. They resemble believers, but in fact, they are not. In actuality, they are sons of Satan.

The Bible talks a lot about Satan's counterfeits or counterfeit Christians.

In Galatians, Paul talks about a counterfeit gospel. In Revelation, we read about a counterfeit church. In II Thessalonians, Paul talks about a counterfeit Christ that we refer to as the antichrist.

Satan's distinct mark in this kingdom is to sow darnel. He will infiltrate the kingdom with, not only false doctrine, but counterfeit believers and give them the sense that they are okay; that they are in the same field.

A man came to my office late one afternoon this past week, while I happened to be there alone. He was there to sell. I was able to turn the conversation to spiritual things and asked him the question that we are teaching people in our church to ask in Evangelism Explosion. It is the question, "Suppose you were to die today and God were to ask you, 'Why should I let you into heaven?' What would you say?"

This middle-aged man was obviously very successful in his field. He thought for a moment about the question, and then said, "I am an ethical man."

I proceeded to share the gospel with him, which he chose not to receive. However, I informed him that a person can be ethical and yet, end up in an eternal hell. This is the point of the tare.

Look at Matthew 13:41-42.

The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness,

and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The Bad Fish alongside the Good

Let us now look at the last parable, which parallels the tares alongside the wheat. This parable is the bad fish alongside the good fish. Look at Matthew 13:47-48.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind;

and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away.

This is a reference to something that happened all of the time in that area. There were two primary ways of net fishing.

- One way was for a fisherman to stand in shallow water with a small net carried over his shoulder.

He would fling it out and the net would form a circle. The weights on the net would cause it to drop quickly.

- Another way was for fishermen to use a large dragnet, as it is called in these verses.

It is tied between two boats and corked at the top, in order to float, and weighted at the bottom. The fishermen would sweep as much as a half mile of water as they went toward the shore.

The second way of fishing is referred to in these verses. The kingdom of heaven is the net. It sweeps everything in its path as it heads toward the Second Advent, and catches everything. The shore represents the judgment, and what will happen.

Look at Matthew 13:49-50, which tells us what will happen at the judgment. Note in this parable that the wicked are rejecters and the righteous are receivers.

So it will be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous,

and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

I believe that there is no more difficult doctrine to accept emotionally, than the doctrine of hell. Yet, Jesus Christ spoke about hell more than the prophets and more than any apostle. Jesus Christ spoke about hell more than He did about love. This is probably because we would never have believed this horrendous doctrine had the Son of God, Himself, not affirmed it in His teaching.

The local newspaper article on churches went on to talk about those who believed in the literal hell and those who did not, and most did not.

Newsweek magazine recently polled people on this. It is interesting that just over 40% of the people polled said they believed in a hell, but about 60% believed in a heaven.

This makes a lot of sense, does it not? We, as human beings, find it much easier to believe that God would give paradise to mankind and that there is a wonderful place of eternal bliss. However, the same Bible that tells about that eternal paradise also tells about an eternal hell.

Matthew 13:50 tells what happens in the eternal hell. Two words are used in this verse.

- The first word is “weeping,” that could be translated, “wailing”.

This is a reference to torture. There is no pleasure in hell. It is not as if the demons are running around chasing human beings while human beings are doing the same things in hell that they did on earth, just a lot more of it. It is so dark that no one can see their friends, and it is a place of torment; a place of wailing.

A member of a rock group was interviewed recently. He sang so often of death that the interviewer asked, “What do you think of death?”

He replied, “I think it would be great!”

“And why is that?”

“Because,” he answered, “I’m going to hell and I think hell will be fun.”

- The second word is “gnashing,” as we are told there is “gnashing of teeth”.

“Gnashing of teeth,” could be translated, “chattering of teeth”. This is what we do when we are very cold – our teeth chatter. However, throughout scripture, the gnashing of teeth is a reference to anger and hatred.

Lamentations 2:16a says,

All your enemies have opened their mouths wide against you; they hiss and gnash their teeth....

This is a reference to the grinding of teeth because they *hate* that person; they are filled with anger.

This is a frightening implication. There is no one in hell who believes they deserve it and they will all hate God for sending them there. They will wail because of the pain and they will grind their teeth in anger against God. No one in hell will believe they deserve it.

It is significant that Jesus says, in Matthew 13:43b,

... He who has ears, let him hear.

He is saying, “Are you listening? Are you listening?”

Truths about the Deceived within the Kingdom

Let me apply these two parables in two ways.

1. First, it is possible to be in company with the saved and yet, not know the Savior. It is possible to resemble the righteous and never be redeemed.
2. Secondly, it is impossible to change an eternal destiny once the Savior becomes the Judge. Once He dispatches His angels at the judgment of the nations, at the end of the Tribulation period, there is no turning back.

Jesus used the same word, “eternal,” to refer to both heaven and hell. In Matthew 25:46, He says,

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

There is eternal paradise and eternal torture.

Let me ask, “Are you a citizen of the kingdom? Do you personally know the King?”

I did not ask if you come to church, or if you attend a Bible study, or if you get up in the morning to pray, or if you feel like God is on your side. I am asking, “Have you ever come to the point where you recognize that to be part of the kingdom, you must receive the King alone? It is not Jesus plus, it is Jesus Christ alone.

I read a story recently about a fellow by the name of George Wilson. In 1829, George Wilson robbed the U.S. mails and in the process, killed the guard. He was caught and condemned to die. Some of his friends intervened on his behalf and President Andrew Jackson gave him a pardon. The news was sent back in a hurry, but George Wilson refused the pardon. The sheriff was unwilling to carry out the sentence, since a pardoned man cannot be hung. The news got back to President Jackson, who was so perplexed that he turned the case over to the United States Supreme Court. One of the chief justices wrote the opinion that a pardon is only a piece of paper. Its value lies alone in the reception of the individual being pardoned. George Wilson died.

It would be tragic for you to be in a place like this – you have heard the gospel, yet refuse the pardon. The pardon is already in print – it has been written by the blood of Jesus Christ – and it is for you. There is truth to the rhyme, “Finders keepers, losers weepers.”