

**Some Parables of Jesus Found in the Gospel of Matthew**  
**A Study in Eight Lessons**  
**Wednesday Evening Studies**  
**Lesson Four**

**Matthew 13:44**

**Matthew 13:45-46**

**Parable of the Hidden Treasure**

**Parable of the Pearl**

**Read the Two Parables Together**

**Hiddenness**

Let's start with something we all see right away. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Parable of the Pearl both have the element of hiddenness within them. It reminds us of the Parable of the Leaven, which we studied last week. Remember: The yeast is hidden in the dough even though some of the translations do not put it that way. Now, in the Parable of the Hidden Treasure, the treasure is hidden in a field; and in the Parable of the Pearl, the man-merchant stumbles upon the pearl of great price, the greatest of pearls (heretofore hidden to him).

One person finds the hidden treasure quite by chance -- in a field. Another person finds the most valuable pearl through a search for other fine pearls. Where might we look in our Gospel for echoes of the theme of hiddenness that would throw light upon our interpretations of the two parables? Might our thoughts turn, for example, to the centurion "and others with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus" on the day of his crucifixion? "Truly this man was God's Son!" they exclaimed when wondrous events accompanied the death of Jesus (Matt. 27:54). The unexpected revelation, a treasure not expected to be discovered! And consider the young man who came to Jesus to ask how he could be sure to have eternal life. "Jesus said to him, 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions" (Matt. 19:21-22). We do not know the ending of the story about the young man. He walked away, we are told; and he was sad because he had many possessions. If Jesus touched his heart, he became like the pearl merchant: He gave up his material possessions in order to possess the most valuable thing he could claim, becoming God's child.

The young man walked away. Was his heart fertile ground? Or was it choked by thorns or inhibited by rocks? Was Jesus throwing out seeds that might find their way to the heart of that one? That young man, after all, was a seeker. He was wondering how he could be assured that he was doing things right in God's eyes so that eternal life might be his.

Let's discuss this as a theme that seems important to the theme Jesus is evoking in these two short parables. What do you think?

## Continuing the Theme of Hiddenness

Why is the treasure buried in a field? Should we think about the field in the parable as many peasants had become accustomed to think in their particular culture -- that fields are places to work but not places they could own; places where their families at one time had claims but no longer claimed anything but a day's meager wage after a hard day's work there? And yet it is a man who is a merchant who finds the treasured pearl. How does the man recognize the value of the pearl that prompts him to sell all the others so he can have the one?

To call up the Parable of the Leaven again for a helpful thought, let's look at something Amy-Jill Levine says. Near the end of her chapter on the parable of the Leaven, she reminds us that Matthew "reinforces the idea that what is hidden is something precious" and that the woman's kneading of all that dough will be revelatory: "and in that revelation the original is somehow transformed" and that results in new insights for the disciples, other followers of Jesus, and the world.<sup>1</sup> I wonder: Do you find a judgment theme in the parables of the Treasure, and the Pearl? Saunders says in his commentary on Treasure and Pearl: "These parables suggest that claiming/being claimed by the kingdom of heaven induces risky, peculiar behavior, including dispossession of all that one has in this world." He continues with a question, "Does discipleship require a complete divestment of one's former life and goods?"<sup>2</sup>

1. What do you think, a complete divestment of one's former life and goods? What does Jesus say about that?

2. How does the theme of hiddenness make you feel? How do you think it reflects something important Jesus might want to say to us today?

3. What is hidden about the "kingdom of heaven," which is what Jesus says these two parables are to represent for us?

We will continue with this theme and more for Sunday school lessons!

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<sup>1</sup> Levine, 132-133.

<sup>2</sup> Saunders, *Preaching the Gospel of Matthew*, 134.

**Congregational Study of the Parables in the Gospel of Matthew**  
**First Presbyterian Church of Natchez, Mississippi**  
**Eight Parable Lessons for Adult and Teen Sunday Study**  
**Lesson Four**

**Matthew 13:44: Parable of the Hidden Treasure**

**Matthew 13:45: Parable of the Pearl**

*Teachers: Have the class read the two parables together.  
Ask for any initial comments about the parables.*

**Consider the Time of Jesus**

What might the people gathered by the sea that day have thought when Jesus talked about a treasure in a field or a pearl that was the finest, most valuable in the world?

Most of them worked in fields. What kind of treasure might they have imagined hidden in a field?

Some have asked the question: Well, why would the person finding the treasure leave it hidden in the field?

Imagine that the farm worker is plowing the earth, preparing the field for crops. The field is not his. The crops will not be his. The farm is not his. But he has found this treasure! Now whatever could be taken from the field in truth would belong to the owner of the field, right?

So what do you think about the poor worker who finds the treasure and then hides it until he is then able to buy the field and everything in it -- is this a moral act?  
Or is it a furtive move that would have been against the law?

Is it greed?

What are the conflicting emotions we have as we read this parable?

**The Positive and Negative Again**

On the one hand, we would pull for the poor farmer if this were a movie, right? We would want the farmer to have that field and own that treasure he found. On the other hand, Jesus very clearly has said that we are not to pile up treasure like that on earth (Matthew 6:19-21). So the farm hand would not be following Jesus. Is there a way to read this that reveals the faithfulness of the one who finds the treasure, reburies it, and then buys the field? Jesus already has said that in his parables he "will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world" (13:35). Isn't the hidden treasure something Jesus wants his audience to go and find?

## **Jesus Himself Revealed**

Consider this: Jesus in Matthew 10 sends the disciples into the mission field to proclaim the gospel. He tells them: "So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops" (Matt. 10: 26-27). The disciples are assured of trouble and pain on their way to fulfill a teaching and preaching mission. And they will see growing opposition to their Master, especially from some of the religious leaders.

As told by Matthew in Chapter 12, Jesus cures a person who was blind and mute. "All the crowds were amazed and said, 'Can this be the Son of David?' But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, 'It is only by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons, that this fellow casts out demons'" (Matt. 12:22-24).

Jesus continues to reveal his identity; he reveals what it means that he has come into the world. And on that *same* day, Matthew says, Jesus finds a boat in which to sit so that he can teach all the crowds that gathered on the shore to hear him (Matt. 13:1). He teaches many parables that day. What must the people gathered around him have heard and wondered?

# Lessons of Love and Hospitality in the Gospel Parables: How Jesus Leads the Church to Love, Welcome, and Serve Our Neighbors

Devotionals by Rev. Joan Gandy  
Based on Parables of Jesus Found in the Gospel of Matthew

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am excited to offer devotional guides for your use during the eight weeks we will be studying Parables of Jesus found in the Gospel of Matthew. These devotionals may be used by one person, two, a family of five or a room full of relatives and friends! The important thing is to use them faithfully, each week. Of course, have a Bible nearby, also!

The devotionals, it is hoped, may deepen your spiritual experience of reading and studying the beautiful parables of Jesus. If you are able, it is helpful to have a particular time of day when you devote yourself to reading and reflecting. Try to create a space where there are few distractions. Seek God's presence by devoting mind, body, and strength to listening for that divine voice to speak to you through Scripture and prayer. And be with one another, taking time to talk about what you are reading and feeling as you devote yourself to this informal worship time.

There are three devotional readings for each of the eight weeks we will study selected parables in Matthew. Choose the same three days each week to share these little devotionals in your family circle -- maybe Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.

Here is how the devotionals are arranged: In addition to a verse or two from the Gospel to guide your spiritual experience, there also is a verse from Psalms that helps perhaps to expand the meaning of the Gospel reading. The devotional concludes with a short prayer that you may read together. Then it is hoped that you will have your own family prayers together. If family prayers are not a habit you have cultivated, this is a great time to try that helpful practice. So: three times a week, devotionals are provided. Use them on whatever days you wish, but do try to enjoy the devotionals during the week designated if possible.

I leave you with these readings with a prayer that God will be with each one of us as we make this journey through parables together in the weeks ahead.

In Christ's love,

*Joan*

**Week Four: May 20-26, Matthew 13:44; 13:45-46**  
**First Devotional**

*Gospel verse for the day:*

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field" (Matthew 13:44a).

*Psalm verse for the day:*

"Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands" (Psalm 115:3-4).

All around us there are treasures waiting to be found. Can you think of some treasures that are around you right now as you center your heart on God during a time of devotion to him? You see things that are important to you, such as photographs of family members, those still living and those no longer with you. You see family belongings passed down from another generation. Or maybe there is a picture drawn by one of the children or grandchildren in the family. All of these things are treasures. Think now about the treasures provided every day by God, treasures that are waiting for you to find them and claim them. Those treasures include new insights given to you as you read a familiar Bible passage; or new ways to find God in the neighbors around you who might need you. God's treasure chest is one that is open to you every day. Take some time now to talk about those treasures as a family. What might God be calling you to find in that treasure chest that you never dreamed you might possess?

**Notes and Questions**

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**Week Four, Matthew 13:44; 13:45-46**  
**Second Devotional**

*Gospel verse for the day:*

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:45)

*Psalm verse for the day:*

"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it" (Psalm 24:1).

Jesus has taught us to seek the kingdom of heaven. He has said it in many different ways. And he says it again in this parable! How do we seek that kingdom? And when do we seek it? We seek it by listening carefully to what Jesus teaches us to do, how he teaches us to live and to love; how to have the right relationship with God and with each other. What does Jesus say that it requires of us? He says that it requires everything! It requires total commitment to living in the way that we learn from Jesus. So, when we read the parable about the man finding the valuable pearl, of course we wonder what a pearl can have to do with the kingdom of heaven. But one of the things Jesus wants us to glean from this story is that we, too, can find that finest pearl. We find it every time we seek to do God's will; every time we sacrifice something we had thought we would do on a particular day and instead do something that will more perfectly glorify God and give God praise with our lives. Think together now about what gems have been placed before you that you might have missed! Where will you together as a family start to look for that best pearl of all? Pray together and read your Bible together. God will speak to you. He promises that he will!

*Now pray this prayer together; then pray your family's prayers:*

Dear God, you have created us to be yours. Forgive us when we forget that. Teach us how to look carefully each day for the pearl you want us to find. Lord, let it be a pearl that will give light to another person's life. We pray in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Notes and Questions**

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**Week Four, Matthew 13:44; 13:45-46**  
**Third Devotional**

*Gospel verse for the day:*

"Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Matthew 13:44b)

*Psalm verse for the day:*

"Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness" (Psalm 115:1).

Study this phrase as you devote some time to God today: "in his joy." The person who found the treasure was willing to give up everything to inherit the treasure he had found. The treasure was that amazing and life-changing. When God calls us to discipleship, he does so with the life of his Son in mind as our model. Jesus preached some hard lessons about discipleship. As we think about some of those, we can get big lumps in our throats and wonder just how in the world we can do such radical things as Jesus called people "back then" to do! Well, we want to think carefully about what Jesus calls us to do today in our world. Where are the fields where we can find treasure? What things have been hidden for us to uncover so that God can show us how to use them to bless others and to bring glory to his great name? God promises to be with us always in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. What a great blessing we have in that promise. God will show us how to discover the "joy" of serving him. Seek him today. Look for him this week. See where he is directing you to the joy of service.

*Pray together this prayer; then pray your family's prayers*

Dear God, we want to experience the joy of discipleship. Teach us the way we should go, the paths we should walk upon, the people we should notice. Help us to love others as we love ourselves. Strengthen us when we fail. Be near when we are weak. We need you as we go into each day and into each evening. Be near and bless us. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

**Notes and Questions**

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