

Israel, God's Hidden Treasure

Matt. 13:44-46

Intro. One of the major questions in Christian theology centers on the future of Israel in God's redemptive program. Today Israel is the epicenter of world conflict. This was anticipated by the prophetic Scriptures yet Christians are divided over the outcome. We believe the Bible teaches that Israel has not been replaced by the church, but set aside temporarily and that God has a glorious future for His chosen people. We expect the promises made to Abraham to be literally fulfilled in a coming day. The parable of the hidden treasure illustrates our view of God's program for Israel.

The first four parables of **Matt. 13**, concern *opposition* the Kingdom of Heaven would encounter.

- **The Parable of the Soils** - illustrates the way the **seed**, or Gospel message, would fall on many whose hearts are in no condition to receive it.
- **The Parable of the Tares** - explains that Satan will plant poisonous **weeds** beside true believers or **wheat**. This mixture will continue until **the end of the age** when Christ returns and the angels of heaven separate the false from the true.
- **The Parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven** - represent the corruption of the visible Church through abnormal outward growth and the inner corruption of false teaching. This enormous pseudo-kingdom or apostate church is Satan's most successful strategy. By it he has deceived many to embrace Christianity without a saving relationship to Jesus Christ.

The final three parables of **Matt. 13** shift from *opposition* to address the *outcome of the Kingdom of Heaven*. They answer the question, "*How will this present age end?*" The disappointments of the first four parables are now eclipsed by **triumph**. Not all of the seed is wasted! Satan will be defeated and God's purposes will prevail. Christ's Kingdom will be established on earth.

The fact that the *outcome* is expressed in 3 separate parables coincides with the way God views humanity. God recognizes 3 distinct people groups on earth and has a distinct program for each group. **I Cor. 10:32** has this admonition. **Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God.** These 3 groups appear throughout the NT. The **Jews** are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The **Greeks**, or Gentiles refer to everyone who is not a Jew and has not trusted Christ. The Church represents everyone who has trusted Christ regardless of ethnicity / social status / or gender. (**Gal. 3:28**) In a remarkable way, the final 3 parables address *the outcome of Christ's Kingdom as it relates to each of these 3 distinct groups*. Here's how this breaks down:

- **The Parable of the Hidden Treasure** concerns the outcome of the Kingdom as it relates to Israel and the Jewish people.
- **The Parable of the Pearl** concerns the outcome of the Kingdom as it relates to the Church or everyone who believes the Gospel and trusts Christ for salvation.
- **The Parable of the Great net** concerns the outcome of the Kingdom as it relates to the Gentiles or the unsaved population at the end of the age.

Time this AM allows us to consider just **the Parable of the Hidden Treasure**. Because the parables of the treasure and pearl are so closely related, let's read **vs. 44-46** - "**The kingdom of heaven is like 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.**" The last 3 parables of **Matt. 13** were not given to the crowd, but only to the disciples gathered in a house (**v.36**) which may have been Matthew's house.

Jesus taught His disciples privately because the lessons contained in these parables can only be understood by people of faith gifted with spiritual insight. **(v.16)**

Like the parables of the mustard seed and leaven, Jesus didn't interpret the last three. (Sing it with me again...*Dum ta dum dum.*) And like the other parables Jesus didn't interpret...an assortment of interpretations are offered. With all due respect, the *traditional interpretation* and some interpretations you may have heard and even taught may be way off base and inconsistent theologically. That got your attention, didn't it? From time to time we need to remind ourselves...*God's Word is inspired and infallible, but the preacher is neither! The best interpreter of the Bible is what?...the Bible!* So the question we must ask is this...*"Is my interpretation consistent with what the rest of the Bible teaches?"*

1. **What the parable cannot mean...**

According to the traditional interpretation the **hidden treasure** and the **pearl** represent Christ and eternal life which a person gains by selling all he has. Even though this view is held by many I respect, it has several major problems. First, Christ and salvation are not a **hidden treasure**. Jesus is the best-known person in all of history. In **Acts 26:26** Paul reminded King Agrippa that the life / death / and resurrection of Jesus Christ) **was not done in a corner.**" In the first parable, the farmer went **into the world** spreading His good seed and likewise, believers are commanded to **"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."** - **Mk. 16:15** Because Gospel proclamation will succeed, those gathered around the throne in **Rev. 5:9** are **from every tribe and language and people and nation**. So there's nothing hidden about Christ or the Gospel!

In the second place, the sinner doesn't **find** Christ or salvation. The Bible describes sinners as being in darkness / blinded / and afflicted by an acute case of spiritual ignorance. The situation is this...*the lights are off / we couldn't see anyway / and we weren't looking even if we could see.* The Bible is clear when it says the Savior finds the sinner and not the other way around. In **Lk.19:10** Jesus said, **"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."** In the parable of the lost sheep, it was the Shepherd who ventured out into the dark and perilous wilderness to search for the lamb that was lost. As Jonah said, **Salvation is of the Lord.** It is Christ who seeks and saves. We can be sure of this because **Rom. 3:11** says, **...there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.**

Finally, sinners can't buy salvation. The immediate problem is simply this... Christ and eternal life are not for sale! But there's another problem..."we're broke." We have no assets to liquidate. And notice the wording carefully...the man didn't buy the **treasure** alone...he purchased the entire **field** to have the **treasure** hidden in the field. He bought the world! We know Christ isn't hidden **in the world** nor must the sinner **purchase the world** to have Him. So it seems the traditional view hopelessly flawed.

But I still remember a Gospel trio number. With the church pianist and the pastor's son I sang the melody...*"I've found the pearl of greatest price, eternal life so fair..."* It was a nice tune and the church people ate it up...especially the little old ladies. But unfortunately, it's based on a misunderstanding of what the treasure and the pearl represent! Like the song, Climb, climb up sunshine mountain...the heavenly breezes are often accompanied by lousy theology! So what do these parables mean?

2. **What the parable must mean...**

Our Bible ears should perk up when Jesus said the word **treasure**. I'm sure they did for the Jews who heard Jesus. **Treasure** is a term the Lord used to describe His people in the OT. **Ex.19:5 - Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine.** Of all people on earth, God chose Israel to be His royal diadem (**Isa. 62:3**) and **treasured possession.** (**Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18**)

Psa.135:4 says - **For the LORD has chosen Jacob to be his own, Israel to be his treasured possession.** This phrase signifies an item of immeasurable worth. Of every nation on earth, God set His love on the Jewish people and *chose them to glorify Him.* (Repeat)

But as we learn from **Ex. 19:5** and other passages, Israel's exalted position and privilege as God's treasure was contingent on their obedience. Their glory isn't inherent, but reflected. If they refused to obey God's voice, God's intentions for them could not be fulfilled. Only through obedient faith could Israel be a showcase to the nations and a working model of peace / prosperity / harmony / and happiness. God wanted to shower them with all the blessings promised in **Deut. 28**. But these blessings could only be experienced when they were rightly related to Him. During the reign of Kings David and Solomon, the world was given a glimpse of what a nation could be when God is given His rightful place. In fact, when the Queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon, she was overwhelmed by all she saw. (**I Kings 10:7**) When she asked how Israel came to be so blessed, Solomon took her to the Temple in Jerusalem. Why? Because Solomon knew the Lord was the source of Israel's blessings.

From the ratification of the Mosaic covenant on, Israel was obligated to keep the Law. From Bible history we know the nation failed to do this. The OT reveals how Israel proved incapable of attaining righteousness by law-keeping. So how did God respond to His way-ward people? Did He change His mind / cast them off / and look for another people group to replace them? Did God stop loving the Jewish people? Did they forfeit their role as His **treasured possession**? The Bible's answer is emphatic. **NO!** God's sovereign choice and plan to bless this nation is unconditional and irrevocable. The promises made to Abraham in **Gen.12:1-3** predate the Law and Israel's failures. The Bible insists Israel has glorious future because God is faithful to His covenants! But Israel proved that human nature can never attain righteousness or a right standing with God on the basis of law-keeping. The Law demonstrates our hopelessness. We desperately need a Savior!

The fact that Israel was a **treasure hidden in a field** is equivalent to **light hidden under a bushel or salt that has lost its saltiness**. It's like the parable about a man who hid his talent in the ground and like a fruitless Christian who lives according to the flesh. It's a picture of *unrealized potential*. Israel was chosen for greatness. They had the potential to show the world how great God is. But their own failures obscured the glory. Instead of a **royal diadem** that gleamed with unequalled radiance, the nation became indistinguishable from the heathen around them. Paul cited Israel's failure in **Rom.3:9** - **What shall we conclude then? Are we (Jews) any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. Under sin** is equivalent to being hidden because of sin. This continues to be the condition of the Jewish people. It's a condition the Law is powerless to correct or change.

So what would God do? What could He do? The **treasure** He intended to display was hidden in a **field** that represents **the world. (v.38)** The nation God called to be holy or separate, was mixed in with the dirt of the societies around them. The magnificence God intended Israel to display was obscured. In plain language, God's **treasured possession** was living like trash!

But let's think about the particulars. The **man** of **v.44** represents the **Son of Man** or Jesus Christ. The main character in these parables is Jesus! He's represented by **the farmer** in the first parable and **the man** in the second and third parables. The **treasure** is **Israel...the people of God**. Because they failed to live according to the terms of the Mosaic Covenant, the nation was conquered and removed from the land. This happened several times in fulfillment of the warnings given in **Deut. 28:63ff**. When the Lord scattered His people among the nations, they became hidden in another sense. They continued to be God's **treasured possession**, but their glory was obscured. They were scattered and hidden. And this was their status when Jesus came. The Jews were under Roman domination. Morally and spiritually, the nation had sunk to an all time low.

As Jesus moved among God's **treasured possession**, He wept and was moved with compassion. Despite their unfaithfulness, God's love for His people had not diminished. Throughout the Gospels, Christ's love is abundantly evident. But Israel's glory wasn't apparent. Their light was obscured by the bushel of unfaithfulness and sin.

Since Israel had obligated themselves to keep the Law, the Law owned them. So what could God do? The parable says, **the man sold all He had**. This represents total sacrifice that evidenced a love that is extreme and uncommon. Nothing the man owned was worthy to be compared with the people He valued as His treasure. So he had a **liquidation sale**. He gathered up all his assets and sold them. What does this represent? Now seriously, is this what you did when you became a Christian? No, you didn't and neither did I. Yet **II Cor. 8:9** says, **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich**. It seems inconceivable that many who teach salvation is the free gift, view this as the price a sinner must pay to be saved. I'm sorry, that view is incorrect! This wholesale liquidation refers to the sacrifice of Christ. It refers to the cross where the Son of Man gave His life to purchase the world. It points to that moment in history when Heaven surrendered its best and finest, for the worst of us. In **Mk. 10:45** Jesus said, **"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many"** With great joy, Jesus sold all he had to purchase the field the treasure was hidden in. **Heb. 12:2** says Jesus endured the cross **for the joy set before him**. His joy was the delight of knowing that by his death, the sin debt was canceled / the law was fulfilled / and many sons were brought to glory.

I stumbled on a phrase some time ago that has stayed with me. It read, *"The mystery of deity is agony."* Of all the truths about God that are difficult to understand...the greatest is the fact of God's Son tortured and dying on a wooden cross. Why was Jesus there? Why did God allow nails to be driven in his hands and feet? The only answer the Bible offers is this...**For God so loved the world...** God loves people. Above everything else, God values the souls of men and women. People are the Creator's most **treasured possession**. Don't ask me why this is, I can't answer it!

So this parable teaches that Christ's primary purpose for dying on the cross was to redeem God's hidden treasure, Israel. Christ did this by satisfying the demands of the Law and paying the price to redeem Israel and the world. Remember, Jesus said, **"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. - Matt. 5:17** In **Gal.4:4,5** we read...**But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law...**Jesus gave His life on Calvary's cross to pay the price every violation of the Law demanded and provide righteousness by faith alone. Only when the demands of the Law were satisfied could God redeem His treasured possession.

And though it offends our Gentile pride, Jesus died primarily with Israel in view. Isaiah prophesied it was **for the transgression of my people He was stricken. - Isa. 53:8**. The NT says the good news of salvation was to **the Jew first**. In other words, the primary object of Christ's salvation was His own people Israel. (**Jn. 1:11**) Because the gospel is to the Jew first, the apostles were instructed not to go to the cities of Gentiles or Samaritans and Paul's ministry in new cities began with the Jews living there. In **Rom. 1:16** he wrote, **I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.**

Not only did the **man** sell all he had to purchase the treasure...He purchased the **whole field** to have the treasure in the field. This reminds me of the TV programs Gold Rush and Yukon Gold and the price miners pay to gain rights to the gold buried in a parcel of land. Yet this is what Jesus accomplished on the cross. He paid the price required to redeem the world. **Jn. 3:16 - For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son.**

1 Jn. 2:2 - He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. / 1 Jn. 4:14 - And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Through Israel's failure, the Lord opened the door of salvation to everyone. When we trust Christ, we are included with Israel as God's **treasured possession**. This is what **Rom. 11:11-15** declares. **Again I ask: Did they (Israel) stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?**

Here's what the NT says of everyone who believes in Christ...**you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light! - 1 Pet. 2:9** This description of saved people is almost identical to **Ex.19:5**. All who trust Christ, are God's **treasured possession** because **in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female... (Gal. 3:28)** Since Israel failed under the Old Covenant of Law, God satisfied that Covenant by the sacrifice of His Son. In the place of the Old Covenant of Law, He instituted the New Covenant of Grace. Through Christ's death, the sins of the Israel and the whole world, were paid for once for all. What the Law could never do, Christ has done. But even though salvation is offered to all and all distinctions disappear in Christ, God has special plans and a special place of honor for His favored nation. His promises to Abraham's descendants will be fulfilled.

Notice in the parable, the man who purchased the treasure **hid it again. (v.44)** This second hiding needs to be considered. For the time being, Israel's glory continues to be hidden and obscured. It was hidden a second time when the Jews rejected and crucified Jesus. For 1,900 years after Calvary, Israel was dispersed among the nations. Though the nation was re-established in May of 1948, the Jews are far from God. The bones of Ezekiel's prophecy are coming together, but there is no breath in them. The righteousness required to exalt them to the place of prominence and glory, has not yet come. Their glory is still hidden because Israel has not embraced Jesus Christ, their Messiah and King. Though paid for, their sins have not yet been removed. But God has a plan for the people He calls His **treasured possession**. Through the horrors of the Tribulation, God will regain the attention of His people. **Zech. 3:9** promises that the Lord **will remove the sin of this land in a single day**. In the midst of their distress, God will pour on them a spirit of grace and supplication. Many in Israel will recognize the One they crucified is their Messiah and King. **(Zech.12:10)** This is what Paul prophesied in **Rom. 11:26, 27 - And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."**

So this is the glorious outcome of the Kingdom of Heaven as it relates to Israel. Jesus taught that God's **treasured possession**, would be found by Him. Speaking through Hosea, the Lord said it just that way. **"When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your fathers, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree. But when they came to Baal Peor, they consecrated themselves to that shameful idol and became as vile as the thing they loved. (Hos. 9:10)** When Israel was sold under the law of sin and death, Christ redeemed them by purchasing the field they were hidden in. Because they rejected and crucified their Messiah, they were hidden again. Yet a day is coming when God's royal diadem will be brought into full view. Israel will be exalted and glorified among all nations. **Isa. 49:3 - He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."**

This is God's solemn pledge. He has promised to display His splendor through the nation He calls His **treasured possession**.

So God's intention to display His glory through Israel remains unchanged. Even though Israel's glory has remained hidden during this period which has lasted almost 2,000 years, their glory day is coming...and ours is too! One day and perhaps very soon, Jesus Christ will return, and His treasured possession will be glorified and put on display.

Let me offer a few practical applications from this passage:

- Do you ever struggle with self-esteem and doubts about self worth? I encourage you to remember that **in Christ**, you are God's **treasured possession**. If you really grasp the love of God / the price paid to redeem you / and what it means to be His child...it will drive away the blues and lift you to that place where you belong.
- Second, God's treasure, or the glory of His people has remained hidden because of their unfaithfulness and sin. In unbelief and disobedience, they can't reflect God's glory. The same can be true for us. The glory of what Christ has done in our lives remains hidden if we live like trash. Jesus said our light can only be seen when it's out from under whatever bushel obscures it! In **Matt. 5:13-16** He said, "**You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.** (isn't that interesting...cannot be hidden?) **Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.**
- Finally, the wonderful news of the Gospel is this...Christ loves you so much...He sold all He had by giving His life to redeem you and me. **Rom. 5:8 - But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**