

## “Finding and Gathering”

**Lesson Text:** Matthew 13:44-52 **Background Scripture:** Matthew 13:44-52

**Devotional Reading:** Job 28:1-2, 12-19

### Matthew 13:44–52 (NIV)

<sup>44</sup> “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. <sup>45</sup> “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. <sup>46</sup> When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. <sup>47</sup> “Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. <sup>48</sup> When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. <sup>49</sup> This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>51</sup> “Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked. “Yes,” they replied. <sup>52</sup> He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”

### TODAY’S LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Facts:** To know that the kingdom of Heaven is priceless.
- **Biblical Principle:** To understand we must be willing to give up what we have to follow Jesus.
- **Daily Application:** To fully submit ourselves to God daily.

## INTRODUCTION

### Unexpected Treasure

On an episode of Antiques Roadshow, a man came with a beautiful violin to be appraised by one of the show’s experts. It had been in his family for years and had a label inside with the year 1519, supposedly the year it was made. The violin was unusually ornate with extra carvings, inlaid wood, and even an oil painting on the back. Rather than having a carved scroll at the end of the pegbox, it had a detailed carving of a bearded man’s head, a rare feature for such an instrument.

The owner seemed confident that such a sixteenth-century instrument would be very valuable. But the appraiser quickly disabused him of this notion. The appraiser judged the violin to have a false date on the label, the instrument being a glitzy commercial product of a nineteenth-century French shop. But since it was old and of good quality, the appraisal was given to be in the range of \$3,000 to \$4,000—still far below what the owner expected.

But then the episode took an unexpected turn. In the violin case was an accompanying bow of more recent vintage, from the 1940s. The bow looked bad because it needed to be repaired. The expert identified the bow as having been made by French master craftsman Eugène Sartory. Consequently, the bow was appraised at \$14,000 to \$15,000, about four times what the violin was worth! And this may have been a modest estimate—a Sartory bow sold at auction in 2017 for \$214,000!

The man had a treasure without realizing it. If he had sold the violin in its case and unwittingly included the bow, he might have received much less than he could have. To have discerning eyes and ears is indeed important.

### **LESSON CONTEXT: The Two Horizons**

A primary challenge we have in applying the New Testament properly to our lives is that of bridging the gap between what is called “the two horizons.” The first horizon is the historical context in which the New Testament was written; the second horizon is the modern context in which the twenty-first-century reader stands. Today’s lesson requires that we grapple with this challenge—and consider what people in the first century A.D. valued as they accumulated wealth or were unable to do so.

In the ancient world, a person’s wealth was recognized in terms of physically possessing tangible assets such as livestock, precious metals, or luxurious attire (examples: Genesis 13:2; Joshua 22:8; Job 1:1–3; Luke 15:8; 16:19; James 2:2). A person considered wealthy in the modern day might possess such things as well. But it is just as likely, or even more so, that a person’s wealth today would be measured—among other things—in terms of his or her investments in futures or trades in exchange-traded funds involving precious metals. The challenge of valid interpretation of the New Testament is obvious: to best determine proper and valid application, we should first try to see things through the eyes of the original, ancient audience.

The challenge is similar when it comes to preserving wealth. In both the ancient and modern worlds, cattle can be rustled, gold can be stolen, and attire can wear out (examples: Joshua 7:21; Job 1:17; Matthew 6:19; James 5:2). Today, however, we are more likely to think in terms of threats to wealth that come via electronic means: phone calls from dishonest telemarketers, ransomware attacks, and wire fraud from criminal hackers. To protect accumulations of gold and silver in the ancient world involved securing those precious metals on one’s person or hiding them somewhere (examples: 2 Kings 7:8; Matthew 25:18, 25). Protecting wealth today is much more likely to involve keeping one’s computer antivirus and firewall up-to-date and being cautious about using public Wi-Fi, since modern-day wealth is largely stored in computer memory banks.

### **LESSON CONTEXT: Parables**

We now move to the third of three lessons on parables of Jesus. In that regard, the prior two lessons (Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23) and (13:24–30, 36–43) apply here as well.

The parables of Jesus come to us in various forms. Some are developed stories; in these we can identify several that have a beginning (sets a scene), a middle (involves a crisis), and an ending (the crisis is resolved). The parables considered in the prior two lessons fit this category.

But there are also extremely brief parables, which have recently been called a form of flash fiction. A popular example of such *fiction* is only six words long: “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.” The imagination of the reader is left to fill in the likely tragic details of this story.

Another modern standard is to tell a story in a so-called microblog or a tweet, realizing that Twitter limits the length of tweets to 280 characters (including spaces). As far as today’s lesson goes, the parable of the treasure in the field has (in the New International Version) 163 characters (including spaces), the parable of the pearl of great price has 161 characters, the parable of the net has 252 characters (not including its interpretation), and the parable of treasures old and new has 176 characters (all including spaces). These are lengths that would have allowed Matthew to tweet them out if he’d had our technology!

These parables include enough detail to make a point while allowing the reader to imagine other details. Jesus’ parables are usually sparse on details, including only what was necessary to make His point(s). Today’s lesson includes four of these mini narratives that are only found in the Gospel of Matthew. These are descriptions of first-century life in a few words that make a powerful point.

## **Selling Everything: Matthew 13:44-46**

In Jesus' first parable, the burial of a certain *treasure* was not the result of an exotic pirate adventure, but reflected a situation with which Jesus' original audience would have been familiar. Burying wealth was not looked at as being a stingy hoarder as it might be today, but was a common practice (see Proverbs 2:4).

The field that the man is in in the parable is a farming plot, not the site for a house. The Greek word here is *agros*, from which we get our word agriculture. Such a field was likely secluded, away from others. This gives the sense that the man found the treasure and uncovered it while he was alone, with no witnesses. This treasure had been forgotten, so only the finder knew its location.

The means of discovery of the treasure is not stated, but it seems to be random. Perhaps it resulted from inspecting the field for possible. In any case, we are wise to focus on what the parable does say, not on what it does not say.

Jewish law from this period stipulated that if such treasure was lifted from the ground, it would belong to the current owner of the field. The man apparently covered the treasure, hiding it again, so there was nothing illegal about his actions.

What should he have done? If he were unscrupulous, he might have merely taken the treasure and left, enriching himself with little chance of detection. But that would be stealing. Instead, he decided to purchase the field, thus becoming the rightful owner of the treasure within it.

In Jesus' story, buying this field was not a simple thing for the man. He had no ready supply of sufficient money; he ended up selling *all he had*. He was taking risks. The risks were (1) that he had reckoned that the treasure was worth more than all his personal wealth and (2) that the treasure would still be there after the purchase. In taking these risks, he invested all his earthly possessions in his hopeful expectations regarding the outcome of this transaction!

The point of the parable is that *the kingdom of heaven* is of inestimable value. But it requires the commitment of everything for those who would be part of it. Though nothing can be given as a price for this salvation, yet much must be given up for the sake of it. This surely resonated with Jesus' disciples. Peter later asserted that they had left everything to follow Him (Matthew 19:27). That is more than figurative language! These men gave up their businesses, their livelihoods, and, eventually, their lives to serve and follow the Lord. When we follow Jesus, the rewards are far greater than what we sacrifice.

### **1. What did the man in Jesus' parable find? What did he do with it? (Read Matthew 13:44)**

#### **What Do You Think?**

How can you discern what you need to give up in order to more seriously pursue a flourishing life in God's kingdom?

#### **Digging Deeper**

Who will you ask to be an accountability partner regarding this discernment?

The second parable's narrative compares *the kingdom of heaven* to the work of a pearl *merchant*. Pearls are unique as gems because living creatures, the lowly oysters, make them. A pearl is formed when a foreign object (such as a shell fragment) is trapped within the oyster's shell. The oyster secretes a substance (mother-of-pearl) to make the sharp fragment smooth and nonirritating.

Pearls are treasured because they are delightful to hold and look at. They come in various colors, with black pearls being among the rarest. Some historians claim that pearls were seen as the highest treasure in the ancient world, valued above gold, silver, or precious gemstones. The high value of pearls is reflected in their use in the apostle John's vision of the heavenly city (see Revelation 21:21).

Here, Jesus Christ is a Pearl of great price; in having Him, we have enough to make us happy here and forever. A man may buy gold too, but not this Pearl of great price. When the convinced sinner sees Christ as the gracious Savior, all things else become worthless to his thoughts.

The point of the parable is similar to the previous one: to enter the kingdom of Heaven requires relinquishing our control over everything. Spiritually, we must give up all our ungodly ways and submit fully to the Lord. Materially, nothing we own can be held back if we are fully committed to serve in the kingdom. Everything becomes the Lord's. This involves a shift of mindset from "I own" to "I am a steward." The treasure we receive is worth it!

## **2. What did Jesus mean by the second parable of the pearl? (Matthew 13:45, 46)**

### **Catching and Rejecting: Matthew 13:47-52**

The narrative of the third parable is quite different, as Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to a commercial fishing situation. His hearers were familiar with fishing in the Sea of Galilee, a large, productive, freshwater lake. Commercial fishing was done using a net (see Matthew 4:18; Mark 1:16; Luke 5:2)—here a large, open mesh of rope that was woven at regular intervals. It would have both floats and weights suitable for dragging the net between two boats, catching all fish in its area of coverage (also known as a dragnet). The use of such nets results in indiscriminate fishing: they do not differentiate between species of fish that are likely to be near the surface and those that thrive at a depth.

If the net is filled with fish, it would be too heavy to load onto one of the fishing boats. Instead, the bottom of the net would be lifted to trap the fish, and the boats would be sailed or rowed back to shore, beaching the haul of fish (John 21:6–11). There, the fish would be sorted with good fish being thrown into vessels. The bad fish would be cast aside, either back into the lake or, perhaps, left on the beach for consumption by scavenger birds or roving dogs.

To leave no doubt, Jesus explained the significance of this parable (Matthew 13:49-50). The preaching of the Gospel in the world does not convert the world. It is like a huge dragnet that gathers all kinds of fish, some good and some bad. The professing church today has in it both true and false believers (the Parable of the Tares) and good and bad. At the end of the age, God will separate the true believers from the false and the good from the bad. When Jesus Christ returns to earth, to fight the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 19), He will separate believers and unbelievers *already on the earth*. These are living people who are not a part of the church (which was already in heaven) or Israel. These Gentiles will be dealt with in righteousness: The saved will enter into the kingdom, but the unsaved will be cast into *the blazing furnace*. The imagery of *weeping and gnashing of teeth* is one of desiring relief that never comes (compare Matthew 8:12; 13:42; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

## **3. Why did Jesus use the casting of the net parable? (Matthew 13:47-50)**

### **What Do You Think?**

How will you cast a wider "net" to evangelize to a variety of people?

### **Digging Deeper**

In what ways can you incorporate your hobbies and interests as a means to meet different people?

When Jesus had completed this series of parables, He asked His disciples if they understood them, and they confidently replied, "Yes." Understanding involves responsibility. To explain this, the Lord added a final parable (Matt. 13:52) to remind them of their responsibilities (See question 5).

## **4. What question did Jesus ask His disciples? What was their response? (Matthew 13:51)**

## What Do You Think?

How can believers show patience when teaching others who may struggle to accept the message of Scripture?

## Digging Deeper

How will you incorporate different teaching methods the next time you present that message?

Not all students of the text consider our fourth example to be a parable. But it does teach about the *kingdom of heaven* through use of an analogy.

A *teacher of the law* was a literate person who made copies of Scripture painstakingly by hand and thus was an expert in the Law of Moses (compare Ezra 7:6; Matthew 2:4; 23:2; etc.). For such a person to be depicted as the *owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old*, indicates several things. First, the “new” and “old” in this context refer to the new treasure of Jesus and the old treasure of the Law of Moses.

Second, since teachers of the law were experts in the old treasure of the Law, they should have eagerly embraced the new treasure of the Messiah when he arrived on the scene (see Matthew 2:3–6; etc.). Instead, Jesus found it necessary to criticize, even condemn, the teachers of the law and their allies, the Pharisees, for their failure in this regard (see numerous examples in Matthew 23). But not all the teachers opposed Jesus (Mark 12:28–34). Some were willing to find a new treasure in Jesus’ teachings about the kingdom of Heaven, seeing it as an extension of their old treasure of the Jewish Scriptures.

Third, for an owner to bring treasure out of its hiding place would be to display that treasure for others to see. We can imagine the old valuables to be those the man inherited—family heirlooms, accumulated precious metals and gems, etc. The new treasures would be those he has acquired himself, perhaps jewelry he has purchased or gold coins he has earned through hard work. But this is not about a wealthy householder who wants to show off. Rather, it’s about a willingness to share what the householder has discovered.

## 5. What did Jesus mean by “new treasures as well as old” (Matthew 13:52)?

### What Do You Think?

What “new” treasures regarding the Christian life have been most helpful for maturing your faith in the last year?

### Digging Deeper

How will you share these treasures with the less mature believers you interact with?

## CONCLUSION

### Giving Up What You Cannot Keep

Jim Elliot, a missionary, was killed in Ecuador on January 8, 1956, while attempting to bring the gospel to the indigenous Huaorani people. The death of Elliot and his missionary companions has made him one of the most well-known Christian martyrs of the twentieth century. In 2006, his story came to the silver screen with the release of the movie *End of the Spear*.

Something Elliot wrote in his journal in 1949 epitomized his passion for serving Jesus: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” This speaks to the core point of the parables in today’s lesson. To remain dedicated to the kingdom of Heaven is a treasure far beyond any material possessions. But its cost is a willingness to give up what we have to follow Jesus.

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, please grant us the wisdom to recognize the priceless nature of Your kingdom! And give us the courage to yield all that we have for it. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

**THOUGHT TO REMEMBER** - The kingdom of Heaven is of ultimate value!