

The Parables of Jesus
iii. The Kingdom of Heaven: Priceless
Matt 13:44-52

The parables of Jesus have rightly been described as Pictures of Revolution. The message of the Kingdom of God is indeed revolutionary, unlike any human revolution promising Utopia and freedom, only to oppress those who stand in the way. Jesus was a revolutionary far more radical than those who endeavoured to change society through force. His method was one of persuasion through parables ticking away like a time bomb with explosive results. His 'stories of intent' were designed to disarm his opponents on the one hand, and reveal the true nature of discipleship and radical repentance on the other. The parables simultaneously conceal and reveal, exposing the habits of his hearers' and readers' hearts.

The three parables before us reveal the paradox of the Kingdom, free grace on the one hand, costly discipleship on the other, with eternal consequences for those who joyfully enter on the one hand, and those who fail to do so on the other. As always, the parables ring with authenticity earthed in down to earth events of the day.

Unlike today where possession is nine tenths of the law, in Jesus' day treasure when discovered, belonged to the owner of the field. Little wonder, that the man who accidentally discovered hidden treasure, joyfully sold everything he had, little though it might have been in order to buy the field and gain the treasure. This was no sacrifice, rather a joyful exchange to gain something of immense value. Likewise, a wealthy merchant happily sold everything to gain the pearl of great price. Whether the discovery was accidental in the first instance, or the result of an intense search in the second, the result is the same viz joyful celebration and amazing gratitude.

The 'sting in the tale' comes in the third parable, the net. The resultant catch of fish is sorted. Inedible or unclean fish are discarded whilst good fish are placed in baskets and taken to market for sale. Earthly choices have eternal consequences. There is urgency in Jesus' summons to enter the Kingdom.

The disciples response in answer to Jesus' question 'Have you understood these things?' is a blithe 'Yes'. That notwithstanding, Jesus accepts their reply at face value and exhorts them to appreciate and embrace the Kingdom by way of treasures old and new. At least the disciples had mitigating factors which contributed to their facile belief. They lived prior to Pentecost. We don't. they did not have the full Scriptures in written form. We do. We have no excuse. The invitation to enter the Kingdom is clear and compelling. If we dismiss it through unbelief or ignorance, we have only ourselves to blame. C.S Lewis reminds us in 'The Great Divorce'

"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell."

Granted, Jesus uses metaphorical language to describe heaven and hell. But heaven forbid that imagery should hide the reality of eternity.

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1st September 2019