

A Lenten Journey Through the Parables

4. Parables of the Present Kingdom

**Sunday, March 18, 2012
10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor
*Presenter: David Monyak***

St. John in the Wilderness

References

- **The Parables of Jesus**, by David Wenham. IVP Academic, 1989. ISBN 978-04308-12864
- **The Parables. Understanding the Stories Jesus Told**, by Simon J Kistemaker. Baker Books, 1980. ISBN-13: 978-0801063916
- **A Journey Through the Parables**, by Rev. John Jay Hughes. Audio CD Course. Now You Know Media. **Stories Jesus Told. Modern Meditations on the Parables**, by Rev. John Jay Hughes, Liguori, 1991. ISBN 0-7648-0413-8
- **Stories with Intent. A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus**, by Klyne Snodgrass, 2008, Eerdmans Publishing Co., ISBN-13: 978-0-8028-4241-1
- *Audio excerpts from:* **The Listener's NIV MP3 Audio Bible**, narrated by Max McLean

Today

Grouping as per *Stories with Intent*

■ Parables of the Present Kingdom

- **The Wheat and the Weeds** (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)
- **The Mustard Seed** (Matt 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19)
- **The Leaven = The Yeast** (Matt 13:33; Luke 13:20-21)
- **The Hidden Treasure** (Matthew 13:44)
- **The Pearl** (Matthew 13:45-46)

Almighty God, in whom we live and move and have our being, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until in you they find their rest. Grant us purity of heart and strength of purpose, that no selfish passion may hinder us from knowing your will, no weakness from doing it; but that in your light we may see light clearly, and in your service we may find our perfect freedom; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- Augustine of Hippo, 354-430

Parables of the Present Kingdom

**Parables of the Present
Kingdom:**

**The Wheat and the Weeds
(Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)**

The Wheat and the Weeds

Gospel Context

- All of our parables today can be found in Matthew Chapter 13, sometimes called the “Parable chapter.”
 - It is the third major collection of teachings in Matthew’s gospel.
- These parables are Jesus’ answer to those concerned by the varying responses to Jesus’ message, including lack of response and rejection of his message:
 - Parable of the Sower (13:1-9)
 - Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (13:24-30)
 - Parable of the Mustard Seed (13:31-32)
 - Parable of the Yeast (13:33)
 - Parable of the Hidden Treasure (13:44)
 - Parable of the Pearl (13:45-46)
 - Parable of the Fishnet (13:47-50)

The Wheat and the Weeds

Matthew 13:24-30



*Voice of Max
McLean*

Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

“The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

“‘An enemy did this,’ he

replied.

“The servants asked him ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

“‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned, then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’” (NIV)

The Wheat and the Weeds

Background

- The farmer has sown a crop of winter wheat using “good seed” (= seed without weeds) in his field
- An enemy of the farmer has snuck in at night and sowed weeds in the middle of the farmer’s field.
- The weed is generally felt to refer to darnel (*Lolium temulentum*)
 - a member of the Grass family; closely resembles wheat until the plant forms a head
 - a poisonous fungus lives in its grains,
 - grows exclusively in grain fields through the Middle East
 - its grains have been found in a 4,000 year-old Egyptian tomb

The Wheat and the Weeds

Interpretation

- The parable addresses the doubts and questions of some followers of Jesus who wanted him to do more and to act faster in bringing the Kingdom of God.
- Jesus suggests:
 - the “wheat” must be allowed to grow without risk of weeding until harvest,
 - then the sorting of good (the wheat) and bad (the weeds) will take place.
 - Premature action will damage the “crop” and curtail the growth.
- In other words: good and evil must necessarily coexist in the present but will be separated in the future.
- Jesus provides this detailed interpretation in Matthew 13:36-43:

The Wheat and the Weeds

Interpretation: Matthew 13:36-43 *Voice of Max McLean*

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

“As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”
(NIV)

The Wheat and the Weeds

Interpretation

The one who sows the good seed	→ The Son of Man
The good seed	→ The sons of the kingdom
The field	→ The world
The enemy who sows the weeds	→ The devil
The weeds	→ The sons of the evil one
The harvest	→ The end of the age
The harvesters	→ The angels

The Wheat and the Weeds

Interpretation

- 1. The “revolution,” the “new age” of God’s Kingdom is *a plan for the salvation of “the world”*
 - “The field is the world”
 - The field (the world) rightfully belongs to sower (The Son of Man = Jesus)
 - An enemy (the devil, the evil one) has encroached on the field (the world) and planted weeds (sons of** the evil one)

***Note:* “sons of” = a familiar phrase in Hebrew or Aramaic, meaning “someone who belongs to ...”

The Wheat and the Weeds

Interpretation

- 2. The revolution or new age of God's Kingdom is an *anti-Satan* revolution: the enemy is the devil or Satan (Matthew 13:39)
- 3. The conflict between the sower and his enemy – between Jesus and the devil – is being played out not on a purely spiritual plane, but *in the world of people*, between:
 - The “sons of the kingdom”, and
 - The “sons of the evil one”

The Wheat and the Weeds

Interpretation

- 4. The revolution or new age of the God's Kingdom comes in *two* stages:
 - (1) A period of growth
 - (2) A time of decisive intervention: the “harvest” time
- During the **period of growth**, the revolution, the new age of the Kingdom coexists with the old age.

The Wheat and the Weeds

Interpretation

- Many in Jesus' day expected that with the Messiah's coming, the new age of the Kingdom of God would immediately replace the old world:

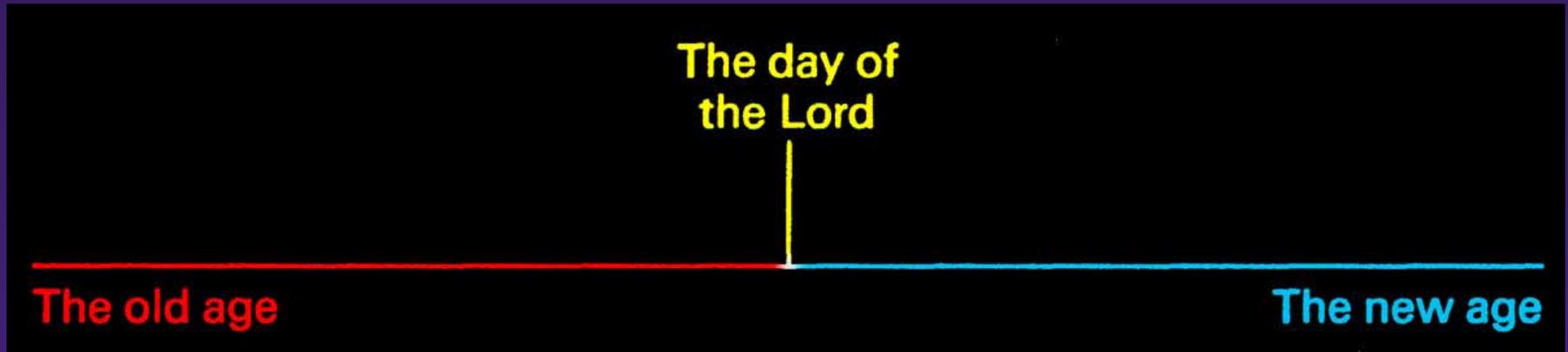
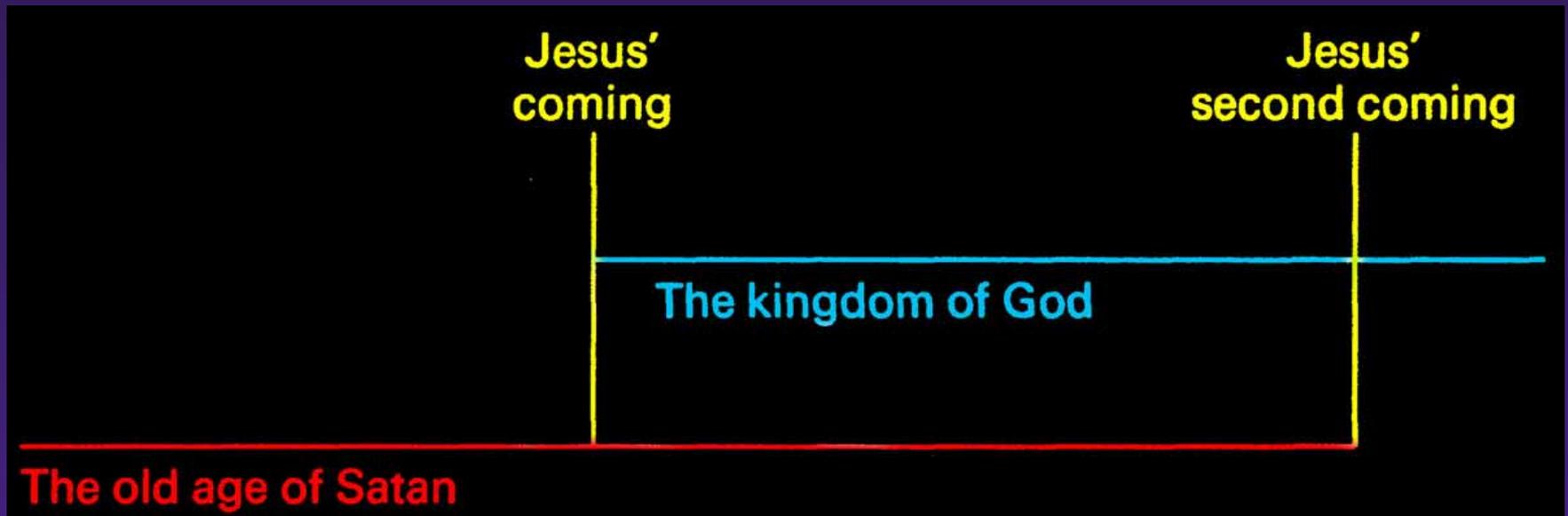


Diagram from Wenham, p 63

The Wheat and the Weeds

Interpretation

- But Jesus is saying that during **the period of growth**, the revolution / the new age of the kingdom will *coexist* with the old age:



The Wheat and the Weeds

Interpretation

- 5. Jesus plays a crucial role in bringing the revolution / new age of the Kingdom.
 - He is the sower of the “good seed” in the world
 - The sowing that Jesus does is bringing people into God’s revolutionary kingdom.
 - The “good seed” are the “sons of [= those that belong to] the kingdom.” They are the new humanity in Christ.
 - John 10:10: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

The Wheat and the Weeds

Interpretation

- What distinguishes the:
 - “sons of the kingdom” (= those that belong to the Kingdom of God) from the
 - “sons of the evil one” (= those that belong to the evil one)?

The Wheat and the Weeds

Interpretation

- The “sons of the kingdom:”
 - Are the seed sown by the sower. That is: they owe their position to the work of Jesus.
 - God is described as “their Father” (Matthew 13:43)
 - Are called “the righteous” (Matthew 13:43):
 - Isaiah 45:24-25: “In the Lord all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous . . .”
 - “Righteous” as a relational term: right with God
 - “Righteous” as an ethical term: living a good and godly life
 - Will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matthew 13:43)
 - Daniel 12:2-3: “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”

The Wheat and the Weeds

Interpretation

- The “sons of the evil one” are:
 - are the seed sown by the devil (v. 39)
 - In John 8:44, Jesus says to those who reject him: “You belong to your father, the devil.”
 - Are those who do evil:
 - Greek word used for “evil” here means “lawlessness” → rebellion against God
 - Their destiny is “the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
 - Malachi 4:1, “Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble.”
 - The language here is pictorial, meant to convey the “terrible reality” of judgment.

The Wheat and the Weeds

Interpretation

- At the harvest (Matthew 13:41): “The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom
 - everything that causes sin and
 - all who do evil.”
- “everything that causes sin” = Greek word *skandalon*:
 - = something that causes people to stumble.
 - The same word used by Jesus in Matthew 18:6: “... if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”

The Wheat and the Weeds

Application

- Good News:
 - In the end, good will fully triumph over evil.
 - *That is:* despite the ambiguity of our present experience of the Kingdom of God (because of the concurrent presence of evil in the world):
 - the Kingdom of God *is* at work in the world today, and
 - the Kingdom of God *will* ultimately triumph.
- Warning:
 - We should not expect perfection this side of judgment day:
 - We should not expect a perfect or pure church.
 - We should not expect a socially utopian world.
 - There will be an ultimate reckoning, a judgment, a “harvest.”

**Parables of the Present
Kingdom:
The Mustard Seed
(Matthew 13:31-32)**

The Mustard Seed

Matthew 13:31-32



*Voice of Max
McLean*

He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it

grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.” (NIV)

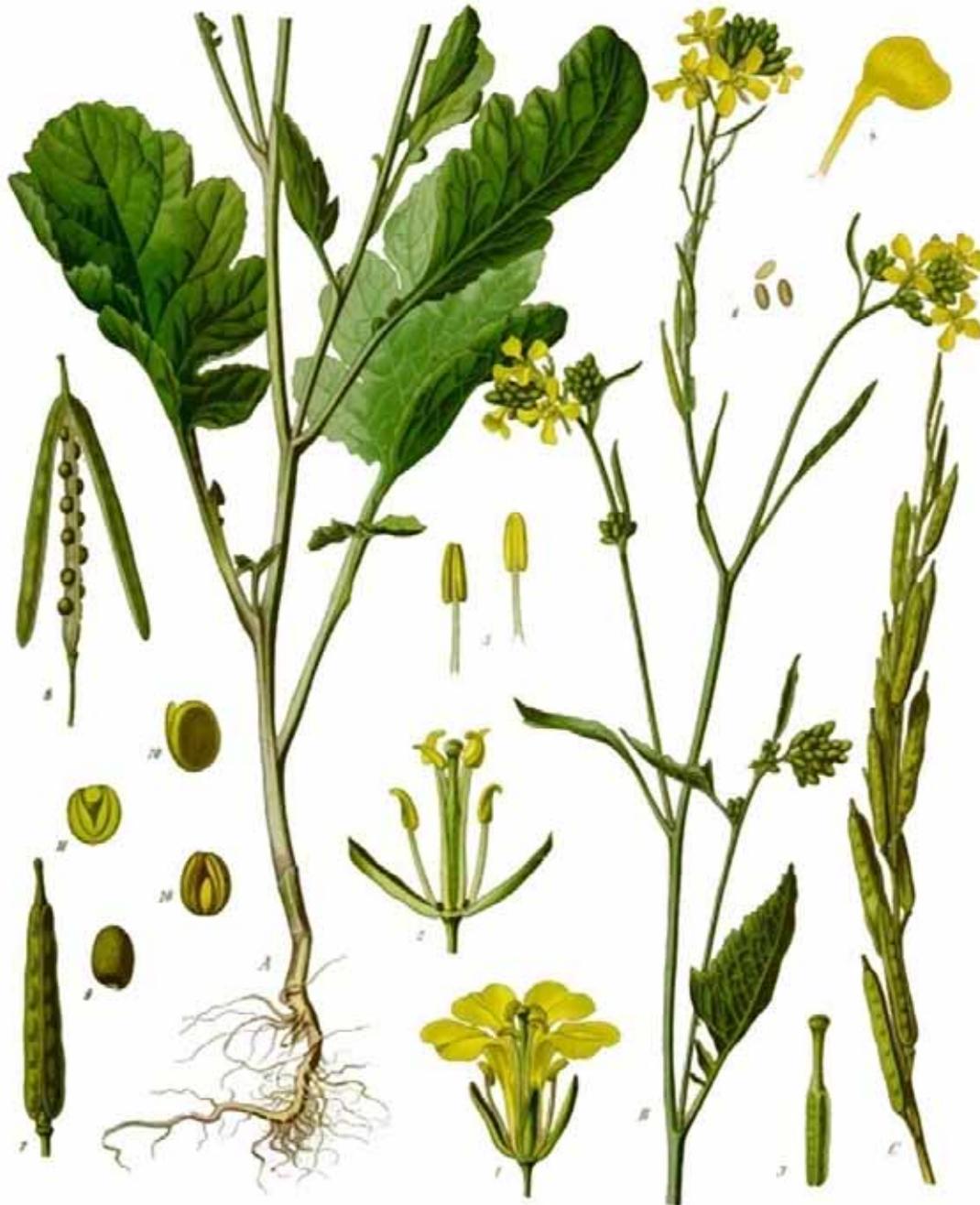
The Mustard Seed

Background

- The mustard plant in question is probably the *Brassica nigra*, source of black mustard, the most important condiment of the day:
 - Had long been extensively cultivated
 - In biblical times the source of mustard-seed oil and a medicament
 - An annual herb with large leaves clustered mainly at the base of the plant. Its central stem branches abundantly in its upper part and produces an enormous number of yellow flowers and small, many-seeded linear fruits
 - seed is tiny, about 1 millimeter ($1/25^{\text{th}}$ of an inch)
 - From this tiny beginning the mustard plant would grow, reaching a height of six feet (or even twice that) within a season and becoming quite sturdy enough for birds to perch in its branches.

Brassica Niger

From: Eugen
Kohler, *Medizinal-
Pflanzen*, 1897



The Mustard Seed

Background

- In Jesus' day nearly everyone had their own garden plot
 - Matthew 23:23: Some clergy of that day paid their tithes with spices — mint, dill, and cummin — from their gardens
- In every garden, the mustard plant had a place.
- The plant demanded a lot of space, and thus was often grown in a field bordering a garden.

The Mustard Seed

Interpretation

- Many of Jesus' disciples expected the kingdom to arrive as a massive, powerful, all-encompassing transformation, but Jesus' revolution was nothing of the sort; it was tiny.
- The parable tells us a humble beginning is not inconsistent with a great and glorious destiny.

The Mustard Seed

Application

- Good News:
 - God's kingdom may have seemed unimportant and insignificant in Galilee in A.D. 28.
 - But that tiny seed sown in Galilee at the dawn of the new age of Christianity has become a tree that today provides shelter and rest to people everywhere.
 - That tree has not reached maturity. It is still growing.
 - Those today in contexts where the work of Christ still seems as small as a mustard seed should not become discouraged.

**Parables of the Present
Kingdom:
The Yeast
(Matthew 13:33)**

The Yeast

Matthew 13:33

He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.” (NIV)



*Voice of Max
McLean*

The Yeast

Background

- Bread was the staple food of the time, and was made from wheat
 - or, particularly in the case of poor people, from barley.
- “... woman took and mixed a **large amount** of flour ...”
 - Actual words: three *satas* of flour
 - One *sata* = about 13 liters. Three *satas* = 39 liters or more than **50 pounds of flour**.
 - She intends to bake an *enormous* amount of bread.

The Yeast

Background

- “like yeast”
 - Actual word is “leaven.”
 - Yeast as we know it today is clean, fresh, wholesome, made from a cultivation of a mineral salt-sugar solution to which starch is added.
 - Leaven in Jesus’ day was produced by storing a piece of dough from the previous week, adding juices to it to promote the process of fermentation.
 - Should the leaven become infected with a harmful bacterial culture, it would be passed on in the bread until the process was broken when people ate unleavened bread for a week (as they did during Passover).

The Yeast

Interpretation

- Yeast, once added to the flour, permeates the entire batch of dough until every particle is affected.
- The yeast, permeating the dough, is hidden from sight, yet its effect is visible to all.
- In the same way the kingdom of God is demonstrating its power and presence in today's world.
- Jesus' work – and our work today as Jesus' hands and feet in the world – is a hidden yet permeating and powerful process which will eventually lead to the reconciliation and renewal of all creation.

**Parables of the Present
Kingdom:
The Hidden Treasure and
The Pearl
(Matthew 13:44-46)**

Hidden Treasure and Pearl

Matthew 13:44-46



*Voice of Max
McLean*

“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.”
(NIV)

Hidden Treasure and Pearl

Background

- In a world without banks or safe-deposit boxes, guarding valuables against robbers was difficult.
 - In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke about thieves who “break in and steal” earthly treasure
 - Greek word “break in” = literally “dig through” (Matthew 6:19). A thief would tap the mud walls of a Palestinian house to locate a hollow spot, and then dig through to steal the valuables concealed within.
- The best means of safekeeping was to bury things in the ground.
- However people who had buried valuables might die unexpectedly — in war, as victims of violent crime, acute illness — before telling anyone where the treasure was located.

Hidden Treasure and Pearl

Background

- Finding such buried treasure was the equivalent, in antiquity, of winning the lottery today: something dreamed of by thousands, though experienced by few.
- Problem for the man (a day laborer?) in the parable:
 - Both Roman and Jewish law stipulated buried treasure belonged to the owner of the land where it was found.
 - Carrying the jar home would be too dangerous. Should his employer learn of the find, he would claim it for himself – and the man would be punished as a thief.
- Carefully, therefore, the man reburies the jar.
- Once home, he scrapes together his meager savings and makes his employer an offer to buy the field.
- When the offer is accepted, he is overjoyed. The purchase has cost everything he has. The treasure which is now his, however, is worth far more.

Hidden Treasure and Pearl

Background

- The pearl merchant is at the opposite end of the social economic spectrum.
- He is a wealthy man. He looks for good pearls that he can buy at a reasonable price and sell at a higher price.
 - The fact that he deals only with pearls (rather than pretty glass stones and trinkets) suggest he is at the top of his profession.

Hidden Treasure and Pearl

Background

- Pearls were, next to gold, the greatest treasure of the ancient world:
 - They were retrieved by divers from the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean.
 - The more inferior pearls came from the Red Sea; the better ones came from the Persian Gulf and the coasts of Ceylon and India.
 - A merchant would have traveled widely in his quest for pearls.
 - The famous Egyptian princess Cleopatra is said to have had one pearl worth a hundred million sesterces (= ~4,200 talents, or ~25 million denarii)
 - In the bible:
 - 1 Timothy 2:9: "... women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes."
 - Pearls are mentioned several times in Revelation as examples of luxury and splendor (Revelation 17:4, 18:12, 18:16, 21:18-21)

Hidden Treasure and Pearl Background

- The pearl merchant has apparently found a pearl so large and flawless that it must have taken his breath away.
- He goes away liquidates his entire stock to buy it.

Hidden Treasure and Pearl

Interpretation

- The hidden treasure, the Pearl → Jesus The Christ.
- Parable illustrates several aspects of the revolution of the God's Kingdom:
 - 1. kingdom is something exciting and extremely valuable – finding it is a source of great joy
 - 2. the value may be hidden, or discernible only to the initiated.
 - 3. the kingdom is a treasure, a pearl so tremendously valuable that it is worth giving up everything for it.

Hidden Treasure and Pearl Interpretation

- The two parables emphasize not the *cost* of becoming a disciple – although the cost is clearly spelled out – but the incalculable *gain* and enormous *joy* of discipleship.