

I read an article the other day... contrasting how products were sold in Britain... and the United States.

The gist of what it said... was that the same product had to be sold in entirely different ways... in these two markets. ... An advertisement in Britain for a cold relief capsule... for instance... would promise no more than that it might make you feel a little better. You would still have a red nose and be in your pajamas... but you would be smiling again... but ever so slightly.

A commercial for the same product in America... however... would guarantee total... instantaneous relief. ... A person on the American side of the Atlantic who took this miracle compound would not only throw off his pj's and get back to work at once... he would feel better than he had for years... and finish the day having the time of his life at a bowling alley.

The drift of this was... that the British don't expect the products they buy... to change their lives... whereas we Americans... will settle for nothing less.

Historian... Daniel Boorstin... suggests that Americans suffer from all-too-extravagant expectations.

*We expect anything and everything. We expect the contradictory and the impossible. We expect compact cars which are spacious; luxurious cars which are economical. We expect to be rich and charitable, powerful and merciful, active and reflective, kind and competitive .... We expect to eat and stay thin, to be constantly on the move and ever more neighborly, to go to a "church of our choice" and yet feel its guiding power over us, to revere God and to be God. Never have people been more the masters of their environment. Yet never has a people felt more deceived and disappointed. For never has a people expected so much more than the world could offer.*

Dr. Jerome Frank at Johns Hopkins talks about our "assumptive world." What he means is that all of us make assumptions about life... about God... about ourselves... about others... about the way things are. He goes on to argue that when our assumptions are true to reality... we live relatively happy... well-adjusted lives. .... But when our assumptions are distant from reality... we become confused and angry and disillusioned.

Aren't you glad that we have the Word of God...? Scripture tries to prepare us... so that our assumptions are not distant from reality.

Last week we began a passage in Matthew 13... where we see Jesus preparing His disciples (and us)... by giving us a reality check... about the Kingdom of Heaven. His disciples really needed it... following the events of Matthew chapter 12 (the chapter just before.)

We need this same reality check... that Jesus gave to His disciples... because our world seems so unstable with so much political division... violence on our streets... injustice... terrorism... threat of nuclear attack... and cyber-criminal attacks. ... After 15 minutes of watching the news... we are ready to scream – “God... where are You?” ... Perhaps you have been the victim of some tremendous injustice... and you want to shake your fist at God... crying out for God to take action against your perpetrator... “God... where are You?” “*They seem to be getting away – scott-free!*”

These are times when we really need the understanding that Jesus gave in Matthew 13. ... But before we turn there... let me re-cap... why Jesus gave this information... at this time... to His disciples. .... Matthew 12 and Matthew 13 go together... and everything we see in these two

chapters flows logically and naturally with a consistent message. So I will review a little about chapter 12... and then a little of what we covered last week in chapter 13... before we pick back up in this chapter today.

In chapter 12... we saw Jesus heal a demon-possessed man... who was unable to speak... and last week... I noted that Jewish expectation was that when the Messiah came... He would be able to heal this difficult of a case. (Jewish exorcists needed to speak with a demon possessed man to cast demons out of him. How could they cast a demon out... if they could not follow the prescribed ritual? ... Ah! But when the Messiah comes... **He** will be able.)

So in chapter 12... when Jesus cast the demon out of a man who was mute... the crowd saw the significance and immediately started to ask, "*This can't be the Messiah... could it...?*"

The Pharisees needed to answer – NOT ONLY if he was the Messiah... but if He wasn't... then how did He perform the unique sign of the Messiah? When they gave their official answer – "*No... He is not the Messiah*"... They said that He performed the unique sign of the Messiah... by the power of **Satan**... instead of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said that this was blasphemy against the Holy Spirit... and that they would **not** be forgiven. They had committed the unpardonable sin of rejecting Jesus... teaching that Jesus was filled with Satan... and officially rejecting Jesus... causing the nation to do so... as well. ... Then Jesus detailed their judgment to the end of chapter 12... mentioning several times the phrase "**this generation**." ... No one in that generation would see the

Kingdom (which Jesus and John had – up until that time – been saying... was “*at hand*.” ... It was no longer at hand. It would now be delayed.

Just imagine yourself... as a disciple of Jesus. You have given-up everything to follow Jesus... and to be a part of His kingdom. Now... He says... It is not coming. (Well... not in the way everyone was expecting... Not yet, anyway.) ... Your world would be shattered. Their hope has just been distanced from reality. They are now confused and angry and disillusioned. This was definitely a “*God-where-are-You?*” moment.

So... then we come to Matthew chapter 13. (Look at verse one) ... It opens with the phrase: “*that same day...*” ... What same day? The same day that Jesus was rejected and that He pronounced that the Kingdom (as they knew it) would be delayed. ... The parables of Matthew 13 are all connected to the events that are described in chapter 12.

We also know this is true... because each of the subsequent parables – after the first one... are strung together (like pearls) with the words “*another parable*” (He told them another parable”)... and the word for *another* in the Greek language is “*allos*”... which means another - of the same kind. ... Each of these parables serve as a unit... each one is part of a whole message that Jesus was teaching them (that same day... in response to what happened in chapter 12.)

Jesus is now teaching in parables... as He explains in this chapter... so that His disciples will understand... but His rejectors will not. They face His judgment... but His disciples needed this understanding... because they were confused. ... Each parable is designed to describe what the Kingdom will now look like. “*Is it completely on hold...?*” “*Will there be nothing...?*”

The very first parable gives the answer to that. The parable of the sower explains that the kingdom will move forward... but only a few (not the majority) will take part in it. ... There are four types of soils (that represent the human heart)... but only one type will grow the Gospel seed.

The second parable revealed that the Kingdom will have believers and Satan's impostaers... growing side-by-side with each other. But we are NOT to launch campaigns... like what movements like the Spanish Inquisition tried to do... to purify the church... because a lot of true believers will get hurt. (And they have... as we see in history.)

These two parables were easy. Jesus interpreted them for us. The rest of the parables are not as easy. ... But if we keep them in the context and flow of Matthew's Gospel... and if we keep in mind the interpretations Jesus has already given (without turning the symbols into something Jesus did not do in this very chapter... or turn the symbols into something that the original 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish audience... to whom Jesus first spoke... would NOT have understood...) then I think we stand a better chance of getting to the meaning Jesus was giving to His followers.

In the parable of the mustard seed... this very small and humble seed... grows into a tree – not a bush. Mustard seeds never grow into trees – anywhere. ... Mustard shrubs grew all over Israel. Jesus' audience would have caught the significance when He told them that instead of growing according to it's nature... it grew into a tree... and furthermore that birds flocked to it's branches... was another indication that something unnatural had happened in the growth from the humble seed.

### Matthew 13:31-32

Now... Jesus in this same chapter has already told us what birds represent. If we want to change His interpretation... we ought to have a good reason for bringing our own meaning to this text. ... Jesus used birds as Satan's agents for evil. (Verse 19 - The evil one comes and snatches away what was sown on hard soil.) ... Now... in this parable... we see birds again. What would His listeners be thinking of... when He used once again the same image of birds... so soon after Jesus told us to see them as evil...? ... As we sit here more than two-thousand years later... we should not assume that the image of birds should be anything different than what Jesus just told us they represent in His story-telling. (Now... granted... these are two different parables. However... they were told at the same time... and both were clearly part of the same message.) ... We must not view them in this "tree-that-ought-to-be-a-bush"... as a good thing... building their nests in it. (This whole picture is about something that should not exist.)

Jesus is informing His disciples (and us) what the Kingdom will look like... until Jesus returns and becomes what He offered to that 1<sup>st</sup> century generation... who rejected Him. And Wow!!!... is this ever an accurate picture of what it has looked like.

The kingdom was intended to be humble – not the giant tree of Christendom it has been... with conquering armies... and vast treasuries... and sovereign control over nations. The reason it has become this way... is because birds (Satan's agents) have made nests (they built their homes) in its branches. The world mixed with the church... it became organized religion... and it grew... unnaturally... into what God never intended or designed it to be.

We stopped last week... with the parable of the leaven.

### **Matthew 13:33**

The image of leaven is used 95 times in Scripture and NEVER is it a good thing. ... Do you think Jesus' listeners would have thought Jesus was using it to illustrate something good...? I don't. Especially since that would not be consistent with the flow of these parables and consistent with why Jesus is telling them. ... This woman hides leaven (impure doctrine) in the dough... Bad doctrine grows and grows inside Christendom... because the woman hid it in the dough. It grew gradually... as leaven does... and no one seemed to notice.

So with these parables... Jesus tells His followers that the Kingdom of Heaven will continue to exist – but not at all... like it would have... if the unpardonable sin had not been committed by the 1<sup>st</sup> century Pharisees and the generation who followed their lead.

Where is God...? ...He is still here. ...He is still sovereign. ...He is perfectly working out His Kingdom plans... in the exact manner... in the exact form... that Jesus said it would be. ... The perfect Kingdom – which at one time... was at hand – but was rejected in the 1<sup>st</sup> century... that kingdom... in all of its fullness... is still coming, folks. Believe it! Just look how accurate Jesus is with these parables.

Now let's take a look at the rest of them.

### **Matthew 13:44**

Perhaps the most common way that this parable is taught in our churches... is that we are to view the treasure as the gospel... and the man

who acquires the treasure is anyone who become a Christian. Eternal life is a treasure worth sacrificing everything we have... in order to obtain it.

Sound good...? ... ... No! It sounds awful!

I have several problems... with such an interpretation. First of all... the Gospel cannot be bought by us... even if we sold everything we have... we simply cannot obtain it in this manner. The Gospel's effectiveness has nothing to do with our own personal sacrifice. Second of all... the man in this parable discovers the treasure... and then (what does he immediately do...?) ... He **buries** it! Does this even remotely sound like the Gospel to you...? Burying the treasure... and then buying the field... destroys any possible correlation to the Gospel. .... And why does he hide it and then buy the entire field...? ... Was he being sneaky? ... Do we need to be sneaky in order to be saved...? None of this adds up. This is a terrible interpretation!

So let me give you a more plausible explanation... that considers the flow of these parables in Matthew 13... and also considers how the original listeners in Christ's audience (most likely) would have understood it.

The "treasure" is Israel. .... That nation was placed in the world to bring glory to God... but it failed. - It became a nation hidden... a treasure not being invested to produce dividends for God. .... So Israel... became buried in the world scene... Ever since their Babylonian captivity... the Jews had been “trodden down by the Gentiles...” After the Babylonian Empire... the Medes and Persians trampled them. ... Then came Alexander the Great... followed by one of his Generals who ruled them fiercely... By the time Jesus came onto the scene... Israel was dominated

by Rome. Hundreds of years – Israel was nothing... buried beneath all the mighty kingdoms and empires of this world.

The "field" in this parable stands for the entire world. The "man" is the Son of Man... Who gave Himself to redeem the nation Israel. ...

During the first Century... when Jesus came... most Hebrews lived in voluntary exile... and they were scattered all the way from Parthia to Spain. In the mind of God... however... the kingdom still existed... because Israel still existed. ... The treasure of God's kingdom on earth was here all the time... but it was *quite unsuspected* by most. It was hidden in the field. But with the coming of Christ... it could have been fully realized. It was all set to come into its own.... Thus John the Baptist and Jesus began their ministries with the cry, "*Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*"

At Jesus' birth... the treasure was *quietly uncovered*. The man in the parable who finds the treasure represents Christ. At His birth... Magi from the East came and worshipped Him. The treasure was uncovered for a short while. ... Jesus had come to the land of the oppressed and downtrodden Jew... to the land where He knew the treasure lay interred. ... Judea was the spot where God's kingdom plans were focused... the spot that was to be glorified in this new Kingdom.

However... no sooner is the treasure discovered... than it was hidden again: (Verse 44) "*The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up...*"

By the time the Lord Jesus told this parable to the crowd... He had already hidden the treasure again. ... The kingdom had been offered to Israel... but since Israel had no use for it... a second concealment took place. ... From

the moment the Jewish leaders blasphemed the Holy Spirit... the Lord changed His approach... which He is telling His disciples He was doing. At that turning point in His ministry He buried the treasure again.

The parable teaches us that He uncovered the treasure and hid it again with joy... because He knew it was only a matter of time before the whole field (and remember what the field represents)... it was only a matter of time before the whole world... and the treasure it contained would be His. The Lord simply enlarged His plans. ... Soon not only Israel but the entire world would be blessed.

Jesus secured the treasure because HE sacrificed all that He had... and by doing so... He bought the whole field.

The time between Jesus' death on Calvary... (His complete sacrifice)... and His return to dig up the treasure... is a period of waiting. ... We are living in that time... It is a period of mystery... when the kingdom is not being manifested to the world.

But there are signs of change. The Jews are going back to their land... and the focus of the world... is on that significant spot... in which treasure is hid. ... The owner is still away... but He is coming back. ... Israel must be back in the land... ready for the treasure to be revealed when He returns.

All attempts to establish the kingdom without the King are bound to fail. Imperialism... communism... the United Nations... and every attempt of man to make a One World utopia... will all come to nothing. ... The treasure is here in the world all right... but only the owner can uncover it. ...

This He will do when He comes back to claim His purchased possession and establish the kingdom of God visibly on earth.

*"Where are You God?" ... "Where is Your perfect justice in this world?" ...*

ANSWER – It is coming! The Owner will return.

### **Matthew 13:45-46**

The sounds very similar to the previous parable. ... In fact... someone may ask... because they are so similar... why do we need both...? ... If the point of this one... and the point of the one before it... is teaching us that we... as believers... should value the Gospel... like a precious gem... and that we need to go and obtain it with great personal sacrifice... then... not only is Jesus confusing us with an apparent contradiction to other Scripture... but He is also being redundant by telling both... one right after the other...!

But on the other-hand... and I hope you see this... that interpretation is not the point of these two parables.... ... I want to show you what I think they are teaching... and that both of these teach something different about the Kingdom.

The treasure (in the previous parable)... has to do with Israel. ... The pearl (in this parable)... has to do with the church... which is mostly made up of Gentiles.

The merchant in this parable... was seeking "fine pearls." ... Those words must have astonished Jesus' listeners... because Jews (in those days) did not count pearls as precious gems. There is a reason why we never see

them mentioned in the Old Testament. ... Gentiles... however... prized pearls... and associated them with the wealth of kings.

The fact that the pearl was a Gentile treasure... helps explain the parable. The Jews despised the Gentiles... and wanted to have as little to do with them as possible. ... But the merchant was seeking something precious only to the Gentile world... something almost foreign to the values of Jesus' original audience.

The Merchant represents Christ. Christ does the seeking in this story. He seeks fine pearls. The merchant has to be Christ... because He sought us. We did not seek Him. He is the One Who does the seeking in our salvation.

The word "seeking" implies that he was going from one place to another. It implies an actual departure from one place and a corresponding arrival at another. The word depicts the Lord Jesus leaving Heaven for earth to look for those... who in His eyes... were of great worth and... who... once found... would adorn His diadem forever. ... We now know what it was He came to purchase. .... It was His church.

Having discovered a costly pearl... the merchant had to decide what it was worth... how much he would pay for it. Then he "went and sold all that he had... and bought it." (What does this sound like...?) ... That is exactly how the Lord acquired the church. .... He bought it at the cost of Calvary.

There is only one costly pearl in the parable because the church is unique. Unlike most other gems... the pearl is a *unity*—it cannot be carved like a diamond or emerald... If it ever is cut... the pearl loses its value.

The church is a unity... even though the professing church on earth often looks divided. .... And like a pearl... the church is the product of suffering.

A pearl is formed once a foreign object pierces the oyster... whereupon the little creature buries the irritation under layer after layer of secretion... covering it... and covering it... until at last it has produced a pearl.

A pearl grows gradually... and the church grows gradually... as the Spirit convicts and converts sinners. ... No one can see the making of the pearl... because it is hidden in the shell of the oyster... under the waters. ... No one can see the growth of His church in the world. ... The church is among the nations today... The Kingdom of God in the world today exists! ... But is it is... for the most part... unnoticed by the world.

But Christ notices! In fact... we are all a bunch of hurting sinners. We are being irritated by others... and we are irritants (ourselves.) But Christ puts around us... (us sinners)... His Own righteousness. He coats us! ... He covers us... with His Own white robe of righteousness. ... What a fantastic analogy this is for the church! Don't you agree...?

### **Matthew 13:47-50**

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 (remember the Parable of the Tares?) The church today has true believers and fake believers. ... But... on the day of God's final judgment... all mankind will be divided into two categories... according to how we respond to Jesus. For the hard... superficial... and divided hearts... who did not

embrace Christ as King... their coming wrath is unimaginable. God's angels will throw them into the "blazing furnace."

### **Matthew 13:51**

Because of their requests to have him explain the parable of the sower and the parable of the wheat and the weeds... Jesus knew that these men whom He had chosen were still having a difficult time grasping the full import of his teaching. .... Well at this time... they affirmed their understanding of these illustrations.

I think they caught onto... the truth that the Kingdom would have a mixed reception... all the way to the end of the age. The Kingdom's growth would be real... but it won't be 100% accepted by the masses... Gentiles will somehow be involved with it... and evil will also mix with it... It's growth would be unnatural... until the end of the age... Then it will finally get purged of all its evil.

Was all this information a spoiler alert that Jesus gave His followers...?

Many of us go to extraordinary lengths to avoid learning the endings of films we haven't watched or books we haven't read. We get upset with friends who slip up and spill the surprise ending.

But a study from two researchers at the University of California, San Diego suggests that spoilers don't spoil stories. .... Instead... contrary to popular wisdom... they might even enhance our enjoyment of a story.

The study ran three experiments... based on 12 short stories. Each version of the story was read by at least 30 people. Surprisingly... the researchers

found that the study participants - preferred the "spoiled" versions of suspenseful stories. ... For example... in one case... participants were told *before* reading the story... that a condemned man's daring escape is all just a fantasy... before the noose snaps around his neck. ... That spoiler alert helped them enjoy the story even more.

One of the researchers had an interesting theory about why people liked getting a spoiler alert. ... He said... "It could be that once you know how [the story] turns out ... you're more comfortable processing the information... and you can focus on a deeper understanding of the story."

Jesus has told you and I how the story of His Kingdom turns out... hasn't He...? ... You can focus now... on a deeper understanding of the story.

Have you ever been hurt by people in a church...? ... Many of us have. One of the reasons that it is so painful... is because the church is last place we should expect to be poorly treated. It is not just to the circumstances – outside the Christian church... to which we sometimes cry "*Where are You, God?*" ... Sometimes it's when bad experiences happen at church.

But don't walk away from God's Kingdom work. ... God is allowing His Kingdom to gradually move forward... imperfect... impeded by a mixing with the world... far less humble... But indeed a pearl of great price!

God's Kingdom exists and all is according to His sovereign plan... and right on course... for all that He said would happen.

He has showed us... so that we might focus on a deeper participation with Him... in all that He is doing. ... Are you part of His true Kingdom...?