The Hidden Treasure

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field. Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!”

Matt. 13:44-46 (Life Application Study Bible, 1571)

Setting

These two parables are found only in the book of Matthew. After sharing four parables with the crowds gathered that day, Jesus addressed his disciples privately with these two parables. Whether Matthew placed them together, or whether Jesus taught them in sequence is unknown. As Kistemaker states in his commentary on these two parables, the fact remains that the two belong together (57). Jesus talks about the Kingdom of Heaven with these two parables: The Hidden Treasure and The Pearl of Great Price. Each parable contains only one sentence each, but paints such a great picture of finding the Kingdom.

Exegetical Analysis

In this set of parables, something quite unexpected and special takes place, overwhelming both men upon their fantastic discoveries. Because of the treasure they find, their lives are transformed forever. According to Hultgren, the discovery of the treasure correlates to the spiritual experiences in which one’s life is transformed when God comes as the Unexpected One.
There is some similarity between the kingdom and the treasure, as both are discovered. The kingdom is a gift and refers to the salvation promised to the faithful of Israel and the church, resulting in “joy” and personal commitment (413).

Just as today, the thought of discovering buried treasure brings thoughts of wealth and luxury, the same has also been true through history. The poor and unfortunate would relate to these parables as an escape from poverty, fulfilling the common desire to raise their class to the very wealthy and influential of society, to which, in their current state, they had no access. Fisher takes this deeper, stating that in both of these parables:

Jesus utilizes the themes that were prevalent in the folktales of the region. The discovery of a buried casket of jewels and other treasure was the fond hope of many a poor person in Palestine. The most secure way to hide treasure from the threat of war or from plunder by thieves was to bury it. This is precisely what one servant in another parable did with his money when his master gave it to him before leaving on the journey (Matt. 25:25).

The one major difference between the two parables is stated in the Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary, “And while the one parable represents the Kingdom as ‘found without seeking,’ the other holds forth the Kingdom as ‘sought and found’” (Matthew 13:44). We can assume that the man who found the buried treasure came upon it by chance, and that his life savings were just enough to purchase the field. Now this incredible find could be his. So he covered up the treasure again, sold all that he had, and purchased the field. In contrast, in the parable of the Pearl of Great Price, the treasure was found not out of sheer luck, but out of a persistent search for the best. Even though the pearl merchant had searched for pearls and traded
them throughout the region, the prospect of happening upon a pearl of great price was most likely the realization of a great dream. Because of his constant search, when he located the pearl, it was only logical for him to sell all the others in order that he might purchase this great pearl.

Rather than focusing on the ethics of the man who bought the field, or the relative value of all the pearls against the one, we need to instead focus on the main point to these parables. In the context of their joy of discovery, the actions of the laborer and the merchant are fitting and necessary. In both the hidden treasure parables, Fisher says that we are invited to view them from the perspective of the one who finds the treasure – or is found by it (71). Fisher approaches this point from a unique position in the fact that he gives more insight into God’s role, showing more of what God does in relationship to man. Man not only finds the Kingdom of God, but is also pursued by God.

Realizing the magnitude of his discovery, thrilled by the possibilities and just overwhelmed with joy, the laborer gladly, without any reluctance, gathers up all of his earthly possessions and sells them so that he can have this great treasure. God wants us, and he wants us to be consumed by our commitment to him. He is a jealous God and wants all of us, joyfully given. There is no sacrifice too great when it comes to His kingdom. Kistemaker sums this idea up by writing:

In buying the field and the pearl, the two men did not make a sacrifice, even though they sold everything they owned. Both the man who found the treasure and the pearl merchant paid the full justifiable price of the purchased items. They heard opportunity knock and were ready to pay the price. They gave all they had in order to gain the one thing they desired (60).
Message (Statement of Teaching):

This parable is about new life in Jesus Christ, with the promise of being with him throughout eternity in the Kingdom of Heaven. Both men make fantastic discoveries, are overwhelmed with joy, and are willing to sell all that they have to obtain something far more valuable than what they could have imagined. Just as today, the thought of discovering buried treasure brings so much excitement and anticipation, it should be the same way when we think of the great discovery we have made in Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Application

In a Sunday School class setting, I would begin by asking the following questions and sharing these thoughts:

Who would like to find “Hidden Treasure”? In the playground outside there is a hidden treasure and we will go on a treasure hunt, return to class and talk about a parable of Jesus concerning a “Treasure”.

How did you feel when we looked for the treasure? And how did you feel when we finally found it? Jesus has a lesson for us today. He spoke of a Hidden Treasure. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered which was hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to purchase the field.

Why do you think the man became so excited that he went and sold all of his possessions to purchase the field? Because he found the greatest treasure that nothing could match. What was

Comment [GL3]: Who have made the mistaken assumption that the Kingdom of Heaven (= God) is to be identified with the popular notions of Heaven and the final reward of the righteous. You needed to do more research on this.

Comment [GL4]: Can you ignore the apparent (im)morality of what the man did, even when dealing with children? You were correct in saying earlier that the story was not an ethical lesson, but we must preclude the possibility that one might take it to authorize unscrupulous business dealings.
that treasure? It was the discovery of eternal life. Jesus would like us to be that excited about the Kingdom of Heaven, and about the treasure he has given us in our salvation.

Comment [GL5]: Here, your mistaken view of the Kingdom leads you to focus on something distinct from God’s rule in one’s life.