

Secrets of the Kingdom – Finding Treasure
From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”
By Phil Brainerd

Introduction

If you ever visit the Philippines, you will have the opportunity of doing a lot of great things. For example, they have some of the most beautiful beaches in the world. If you’ve had enough sun, you could visit the Puerto Princesa Underground River, a geological destination so impressive, it was included in the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1999. Or, You might travel to the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras, another UNESCO site.



Boracay Beach, Philippines

And wherever you go, you will run into some of the nicest people around.

At some point, you may run into something very unique, and for many outsiders totally unexpected: Treasure hunters. All over the Philippine islands, you will find people searching for something called “Yamashita’s Gold”.

Legend says that during World War II, the Japanese plundered all the territories they invaded. They stole treasures from governments, wealthy landowners and even looted monasteries and convents. In doing this, they amassed billions in treasure. For some reason that isn’t clear in the legend, the Japanese decided to hide the treasures in the Philippines.

The task was assigned to General Tomoyuki Yamashita. The legend says that he found caves and other locations suitable for hiding the treasure. In some versions, local men were forced into slave labor. They were made to excavate sites, and then haul the treasure in. After that, those workers were killed in order to keep the location of the sites secret. Some say even the soldiers who directed them were killed. The sites were hidden so well that to this day, they’re just about impossible to find. Add to that, the sites may be guarded by spirits of the murdered workers and other supernatural beings.



General Tomoyuki Yamashita

Well, one man claimed that he found one of the sites. His name was Rogelio Roxas. He researched for most of his life and spent considerable amounts of his small income on equipment. Then, one day, he said, he found a cave. Inside were gold bars, and plundered artifacts, including a golden Buddha filled with diamonds - Or so the story goes.

Sadly, the Philippines were run at the time by a thug named Ferdinand Marcus. He had spies all over who reported the find. Then, soldiers came during the night to confiscate what Rogelio found. Rogelio was tortured and imprisoned.

Later, Ferdinand Marcus was forced out of power and made to live in exile in Hawaii. So, Rogelio sued in a Hawaiian court. Guess what? He won! He convinced a court that he found treasure, and that Marcus stole it from him. He was awarded a settlement over a billion dollars. Tragically, Rogelio died the night before the settlement was announced. Even after a successful lawsuit, no money ever changed hands. Imagine that - Someone spends their whole life working to find a fabled treasure. Only to have it take from him.

That brings us to our topic today. People have dreamt about hidden treasure all through the centuries. Is it possible to find treasure today? And more important, is it possible to find treasure that no one can ever take from you? The answer is yes, and Jesus is going to tell us about it.

Today, Jesus is going to let us in on another secret. He'll tell us about finding treasure. But before looking at what Jesus has to tell us, let's be reminded: Jesus told these stories almost 2,000 years ago. If you've been in churches for any length of time, you've likely heard the secret. However, we have to ask: Does the fact that we know about the secret mean we've fully thought it through?

With that in mind, let's read.

Treasure Buried in a Field

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.
(Matthew 13:44)

As we said, people have dreamt of hidden treasure through the centuries. As it turns out, the people of ancient Israel were no exception. Here's why: Today, when we think of money, we think of money represented by paper. If we have lots of money, we put it in banks. In ancient times, paper money had not been invented. So, money was represented by metal coins. Gold was the metal of choice, because it didn't rust. They had banks, but they were only to be found in major cities - And a lot of people didn't like them. So, where could the average person put their money? Answer: Bury it in your field somewhere. It was not at all uncommon for a property owner to have a secret stash out in their field. When they needed money, they went out to their field and dug up the stash and took out some coins. When they had extra money, they did the opposite.

Throw in a sadly common occurrence in ancient days: Invasion. Soldiers show up one day from a neighboring country and kill everyone. Or they take captives and carry them away, never to

return. That resulted in money being left in secret stashes all over the ancient world. It was not unheard of for people to stumble onto one of these stashes.

So, Jesus uses this image as the base of a parable. A man stumbles onto a treasure. Apparently, he doesn't stumble onto it on his own property. What's he doing there? Was he a hired worker? Was he a traveler who just happened to be passing through? We don't know. All we know is that he knows what he just found. Apparently, he's not a pauper or a slave. He has a few things that he owns. So, he hides the treasure, sells whatever he has, and buys the field.

The application is very clear: Jesus is saying that the kingdom of heaven is immensely valuable. It's so valuable, it's worth giving up everything.

Now, before we get any further in trying to understand this parable, let's mention a principle for interpreting the parables of Jesus. Most scholars suggest that parables are meant to make one or a small number of points. You don't want to get too distracted by details. The details are important, just don't get lost. In this case, many people ask a question: If you found treasure in someone's field, doesn't it belong to the owner of the field? Is it moral to cover up the treasure and offer the owner something much less than what the field is actually worth? In telling this story, is Jesus encouraging people to be immoral?

That's where good principles of Bible interpretation come in. Jesus is making one big, main point: The Kingdom of Heaven is valuable beyond belief. And it's worth more than anything that you might have.

If we want to consider possible sub points, let's remember the context of these stories. These are secrets of the Kingdom. They are not for everyone. So, consider this: That treasure was left by someone who is long gone - Probably for centuries. Whoever currently owns the land is sitting on a treasure, and he doesn't know it. When someone offers him a standard price for a field, he thinks he's getting a good deal. So, he's happy.

Isn't this what the world looked like from a spiritual perspective? Here's the Lord of Glory telling everyone about the kingdom. It's available to anyone who will listen. However, most people miss it. The rich and powerful stay home and attend to business. Those who bother to attend listen for a little bit, and then go home. The religious leaders totally miss the point. So, the knowledge of the kingdom is like a secret. Unlike the rich and powerful, the kingdom is cherished by people who understand what it's worth. Most who enter the kingdom will be the poor and underprivileged. That's the treasure buried in the field.

Another question comes up when you understand the teachings of the New Testament on Salvation. How does one receive salvation? Here's what the apostle Paul taught:

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.
(Ephesians 2:8-9)

The Bible teaches that salvation is a free gift. You receive it by having faith in Jesus. And Jesus gives it to anyone who will believe in him. If this parable was the only statement that Jesus ever made, it would look like salvation is something you purchase.

Again, the rules of Bible interpretation come into play. Here's an important one: When you see something stated in the Bible multiple times, the best way to understand it is to find the simplest and clearest of the statements. That becomes your starting point. In this case, Paul stated the path to salvation clearly. There are a number of equally clear statements other places in the New Testament that say the same thing.

So, in the case of the parable, we look for the big point. Again, the kingdom is valuable. For those who understand it, it's like finding hidden treasure. Jesus didn't intend this to be his sole statement on how to obtain salvation.

Now, although the entryway to the kingdom is faith alone, the road of discipleship is filled with choices. Many of those choices involve giving things up. Over and over, followers of Jesus have to consider what's truly valuable. And notice something important: When this man found a treasure, he didn't mope. He didn't complain about giving up everything he owned. We're told: With "joy" he gave up everything he had. Giving up everything was well worth it to this man. That's a lesson for us today.

The Pearl of Great Value

In the case of the treasure hidden in the field, we see a man who wasn't looking for anything special. But, when he found something of value, he recognized it and acted. How about people who are specifically looking for something? For those people, Jesus tells another parable:

45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. (Matthew 13:45-6)

Here's another one that we don't tend to understand in the modern world. Today, pearls are beautiful, but not the most expensive thing you can own. In the days of Jesus, the pearl was the most expensive jewel known. Pearls are found in oysters. Today, we have oyster farms. We have machines to harvest and open oysters. In those days, there was no organized place to find oysters. Divers had to go down deep into dangerous waters and look for them one at a time. And of course, the divers had no source of compressed air like modern divers - They had to hold their breath. It was not uncommon for these men to die while looking for oysters. That made any pearl rare and precious.

And that made them a good base for a parable. A merchant who specialized in pearls came across one that was very unusual. It stood out among all the others. In fact, it stood out among

all the pearls this man had ever seen. The pearl was the rarest of jewels. And this was the rarest of pearls. It was clearly worth so much that the merchant sold all his other pearls to obtain it - Along with everything else that he owned.

Once again, this is a picture of the kingdom. As this pearl was clearly more valuable than any other jewel, the kingdom is valuable beyond anything else the world has to offer.

In the last parable, a man stumbled onto treasure. In this parable, a man spent his whole life looking for something. And when he found it, he recognized it immediately. Through history, there have been people that some theologians call “seekers.” They realize they want something, and they realize it’s not anywhere on this earth. So, they look to religion. They look at all the world religions, which today would be Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and the rest. But when those people come to the message of the cross, those who are truly looking for answers know they need look no longer.

Further, this parable offers us something more into the vision of the kingdom that Jesus offers. In the first parable, a man finds treasure. We’re assuming it’s things like gold coins - Things he can use to have a wonderful life. You can buy things with that kind of treasure. You can take care of yourself.

But a single pearl is different. If you have a thousand normal pearls, you can sell them one at a time and live off the proceeds. If you sell all those pearls at once to buy just one, what will you do with the one? Here’s what you can do: If you love pearls, you can gaze at it. You can cherish it.

At the center of the kingdom of heaven is God. Here’s what King David said in one of his Psalms:

One thing I ask from the Lord,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple.
(Psalm 27:4)

The man who found the pearl of great price was content to gaze at it. People who seek the kingdom of God do so because they know that God lives there, and they seek to gaze upon his beauty for all eternity.

For the People Who Don’t Receive the Kingdom

So Jesus has told us two parables about treasure. In each case, the treasure represents the Kingdom of Heaven, which is more valuable than anything on earth - By far. It’s worth anything.

But, what if people miss the point? Imagine that two people are walking down a beach. One is picking up seashells. He's found a lot of them and has an armload. The other is enjoying a piece of candy that he got at Christmas time: A chocolate coin wrapped in gold foil.

As they're walking down the beach, they stumble onto a pirate's chest full of gold. To many people, that would be the dream of a lifetime. But the one with the seashells says, "If I pick up any of that gold, I'll have to drop my shells. They're pretty and interesting - And I've worked very hard to find them." So, he passes. The other looks at his chocolate coin and says, "I've got gold that just as good - in fact, I can eat it!" He takes a big bite, and passes on the treasure chest, too.

Well, that would be tragic beyond belief. However, there are many who do the same thing with the kingdom of heaven. It's worth more than anything. And it's available to anyone who recognizes its worth. But sadly, the world is filled with cheap imitations that seem at the moment to be more valuable to many people. What happens to those people? Jesus has one more secret of the kingdom to share for those people - One more parable.

47 "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 48 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. (Matthew 13:47-50)

Up to this point, Jesus has spoken to an agricultural society. Did he forget that four out of twelve apostles were fishermen? Apparently not. This is one for them.

There have always been three ways to catch fish. All three were used by the men that Jesus chose to be his closest followers. First, you can put a hook on a string and hope the fish will bite it. Second, you can throw a net into the water and haul it back.

Then, there's the dragnet. The dragnet was a very large net that had one end anchored at the shore. The other end was attached to a boat. The net had a strong rope along the top the skimmed the surface of the water. It had weights at the bottom that made the bottom skim along the ocean floor. The men in the boat started at the shore and began to row. They rowed in half circle, dragging the net along. They rowed until they reached the shore again. While they were rowing, the fish no doubt saw the net coming. Some swam outside the perimeter to freedom. But many swam the wrong direction, not knowing that the net would eventually catch up. Those fish were trapped. When the boat has made full circle, a large group of people start to drag the net onto the shore.

There's good news and bad news with dragnet fishing. The good news is: You get some fish that you want. The bad news is: You get a lot that you don't want. You also get seaweed and any junk that might have fallen into the water over time. So, just like Jesus said, once the net is on the shore, workers sit down and start dividing things up. The good fish are kept. The bad fish and the junk are thrown out.

So, what's the point of this story? Jesus gives us a frightening explanation.

49 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous 50 and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:49-50)

While telling these parables, Jesus has told us once, then twice, and now three times. There are two types of people in the world: Those who will enter the eternal kingdom. And those who will enter eternal judgement. The two different types will be obvious. It will be easy for the angels to tell them apart. For those destined for judgement, there will be no escape - There will be nowhere to hide.

What will the place of judgement look like? It will be like a blazing furnace. This is a scary picture. Many of my readers say, "Phil, why are we seeing so many scary pictures?" Answer: Because Jesus talks about this a lot. Jesus warned about the dangers of hell more than he talked about love.

And hell will be real. Jesus says, "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." I can't tell you how many times I've read stories of people who say things like: "I don't want to go to heaven. - Angels and harps and clouds - that's boring! I want to go to hell. That's where all the interesting people will go. It'll be one big party."

Well, I'm afraid not. That's not how it will work. People who go to Hell will spend eternity regretting it.

Conclusion

Usually, when I close a series, I say something like, "Let's pull this all together." In this case, Jesus pulls it all together.

51 "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied.

52 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." (Matthew 13:51-52)

Jesus does a final check. He asks the disciples, "Do you get all this?" They say, "Yes." Previously, Jesus has shared the knowledge of the kingdom with any who would listen. Tragically, most turned away. But these men got it. Jesus has shared the secrets of the kingdom with them. It's now their job to teach others.

In those days, a good homeowner did more than merely enjoy his property and possessions.

He was responsible to care for everyone in the house. He was to make sure everyone had what they needed. He was to make sure everyone was properly trained to do their jobs. From this point forward, the disciples would become like the master of a house. As we said earlier, the owner had a stash in the field. This master had a storeroom. He pulled out coins, or treasures, when he needed them. That's what the disciples would do.

Jesus says that some of the treasure is new, and some is old. As he has done many times, he stresses that he is a continuation of the entire history of revelation between God and mankind. He is not throwing out everything that was previously taught. He's using it, clarifying it, explaining it, and then building on it.

We know from history that these men faithfully carried out their instructions. They did so at great cost. Because they were faithful, we can learn the secrets of the kingdom. It's been a long time since then. Maybe we are the end of the line? Maybe we are the generation that will see all these things come together. Or, maybe, we are to be masters of a house. Maybe we are to learn the secrets of the kingdom and pass them along to future generations.

When we hear the secrets, how will we treat them? Will we treat them like treasures? Things that are more valuable than anything we can possibly imagine. Or, will we be like people who have treasure within reach, but who foolishly pass by?

We started with the story of a man who found fabled treasure, only to have it taken from him. Jesus offers us a treasure worth more than any fable of history. And once you find it, no one can ever take it away.

The choice is ours. I hope that everyone here will enter the kingdom and enjoy an eternity with the God who has opened his heart and his mind to us. I hope everyone here will learn to cherish the secrets we have heard.

Let's all thank our Lord that he considered us worthy to hear the secrets of the Kingdom.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church of Teaneck, NJ

TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site:

PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

PeaceWithGod.net