

# “WEE The Kingdom Of God”

Matthew 13:31-34 & 41-43

December 18, 2022

## INTRO:

- ~ Last time I began with *“Where Are The Christians?”*
- > I was asking for wheat...from churches full of weeds
- > Today’s sermon starts by asking the same question
- > *But the answer may surprise & challenge you!*  
(and that’s the point!)

## PRAAYER

## CONTEXT:

- A. Sermon Series: *“SEE The Kingdom Of God”*
- B. So far...
  - a. Define/See “the kingdom of God” (cf. **John 3:3**)
  - b. Focusing on **Matthew 13**’s 8 parables & 2 Q&A’s

**Matthew**  
Ch. 13

# The Kingdom of God

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- c. First & last parables = *BE the kingdom of God*
  - i. Parable of the Sower/Soils
    1. The kingdom of God seed-centric...
    2. The kingdom of God is **FRUIT-FULL!**
  - ii. Parable of Old & New Treasure
    1. The kingdom of God is eternally true
    2. The kingdom of God is **FAITH-FULL!**
- d. 2 Q&A sessions: *QUERY the kingdom of God*
  - i. **Disciples ask Jesus:**
    1. Q: **Why parables LORD?**
    2. A: Judgement begins here.
  - ii. **Jesus asks Disciples**
    1. Q: **Do you understand all this?**
    2. A: Yes LORD.
- e. Second & 7th parables: *WE the kingdom of God*
  - i. Parable of the Weeds
    1. The kingdom of God is **AT WAR**
      - a. War for INTEGRITY vs. impurity
      - b. War for IDENTITY vs. inauthenticity
      - c. War for INTENSITY vs. insanity
    2. The kingdom's kids will WIN!
    3. The lost will weep & gnash their teeth!
  - ii. Parable of the Drag-Net
    1. The "judgement net" is **drawing NEAR!**
    2. ALL the fish will be split into 2 groups...
    3. ALL non/fake Christian fish go to hell...

**T/S:** Today...if we ask again: "*Where are the Christians?*," or, "*Where is the kingdom of God?*," do you know **who to look for, what to look for, and/or where to look?**

Today = 4 parables; 3 steps; 2 pairs; 1 Big Idea...

**BIG IDEA:** *Most people are clueless & Christless when it comes to the kingdom of God!*

(That was one of Christ's most penetrating points in the following 4 parables... and it will be mine as well.)

**VIDEO:** *Lesson from the Triumphal Entry*

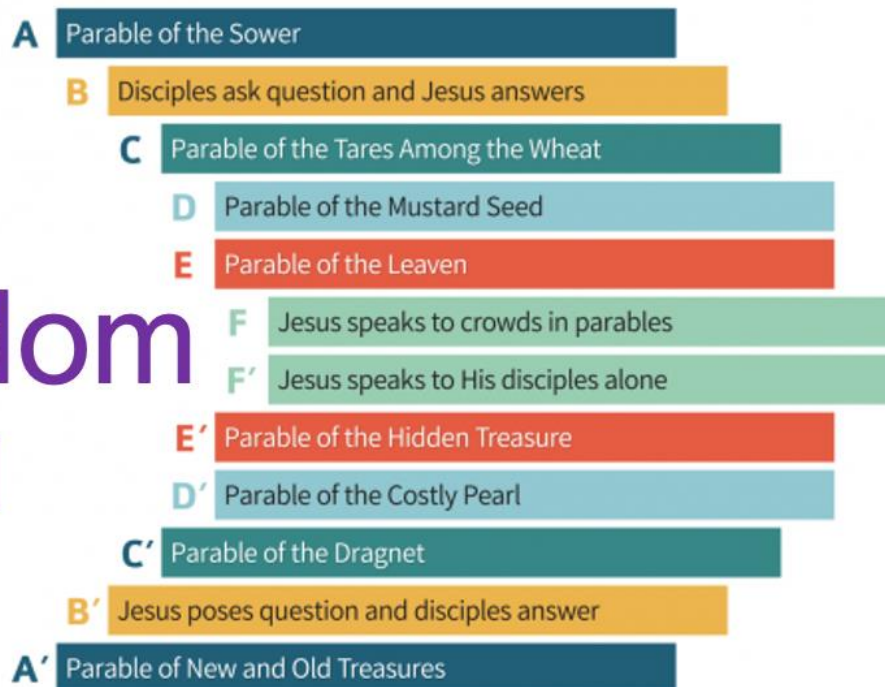
**TEXT:**

Let's revisit the text's structure... because it helps to reveal the text's substance... Today that is especially true.

**Matthew**  
Ch. 13

# The Kingdom of God

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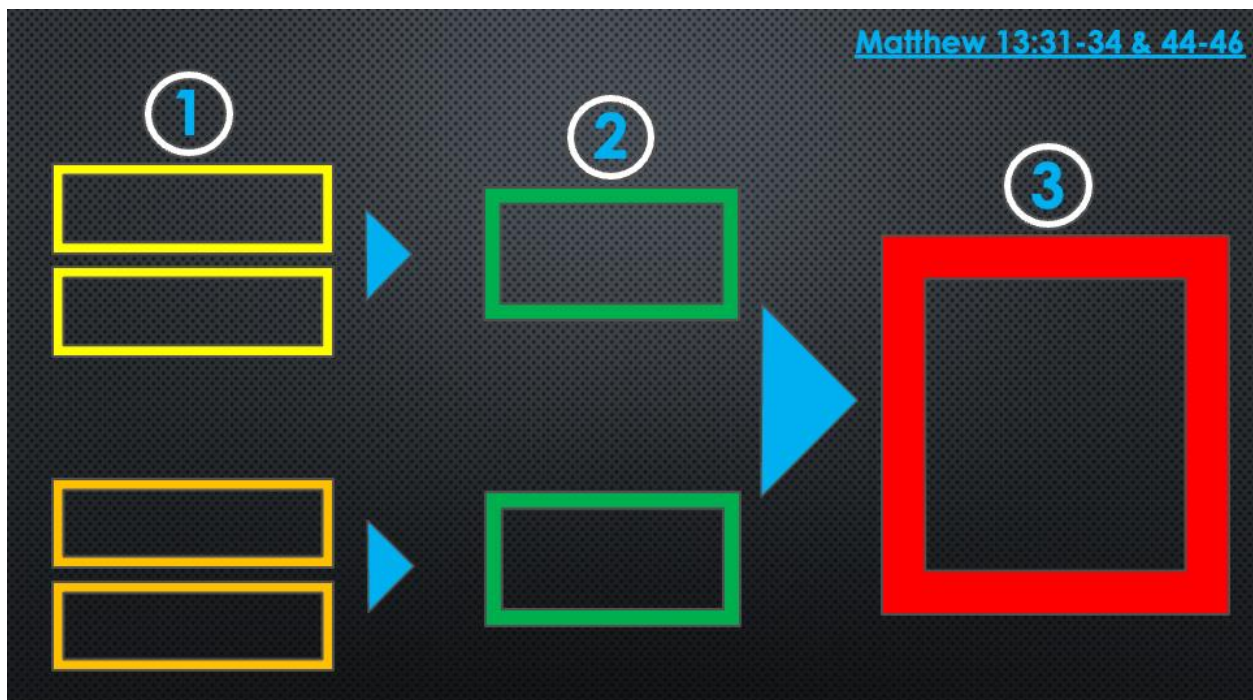
## NOTE:

- ~ D & E are united and as a pair/couple (no step)
- ~ E' & D' are also united as a pair/couple (no step)
- ~ Still... each parable has its own individual identity
- ~ D & E are parallel/related to E' & D' (united message)

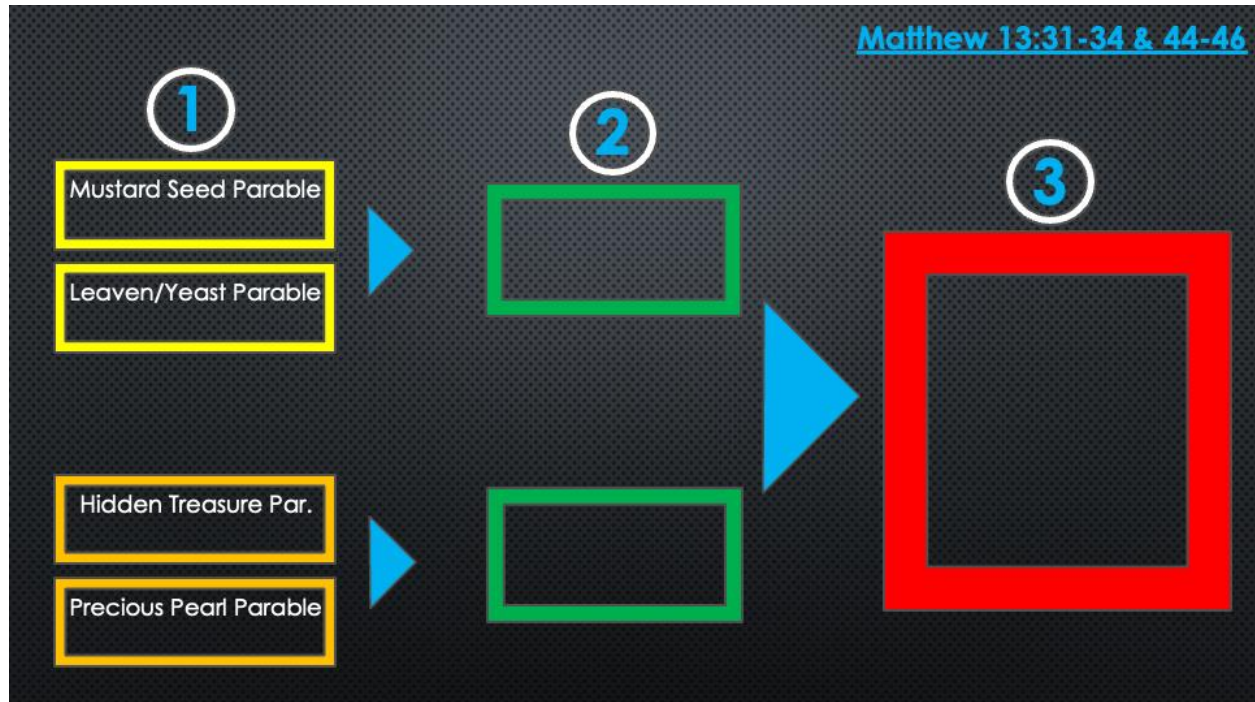
## PREVIEW:

- 1... **EXPLAIN** the 4 PARABLES
- 2... **UNIFY** the 2 PAIRS/COUPLETS
- 3... **APPLY** the 1 BIG IDEA

Visually it will look/flow like this...



Today's 4 parables are:



Let's begin with the Parable of the Mustard Seed

Matthew 13:31-32

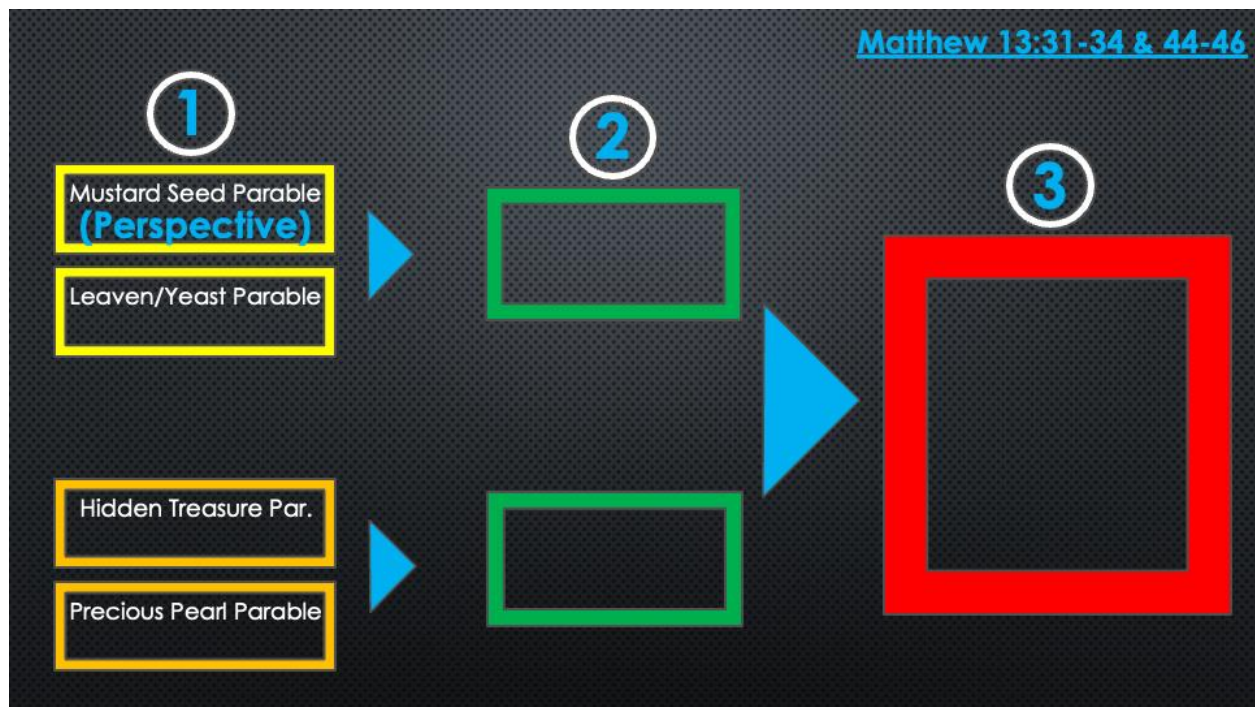
**31**He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. **32**It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

- ~ Remember the parable's character... hidden teaching
- ~ It's not about the ending... **it's about the beginning!**
- ~ The shock & conviction is all about **PERSPECTIVE...**
- ~ Very few want the kingdom's humble beginnings...

T/S: *Today, far too many want to be served rather than serve*

**VIDEO:** *Living the Parable of the Mustard Seed*

- ~ **How about you?** Too many in our day would be like...
- > Those who neglected Noah... & mocked Moses...
  - > Those who bet on Goliath... & wanted a King Saul
  - > Those who doubted Jesus' design for discipleship
  - > Those who wanted the "big show" & crowds...
  - > *Those who cheered for Jesus as He cried for them!*

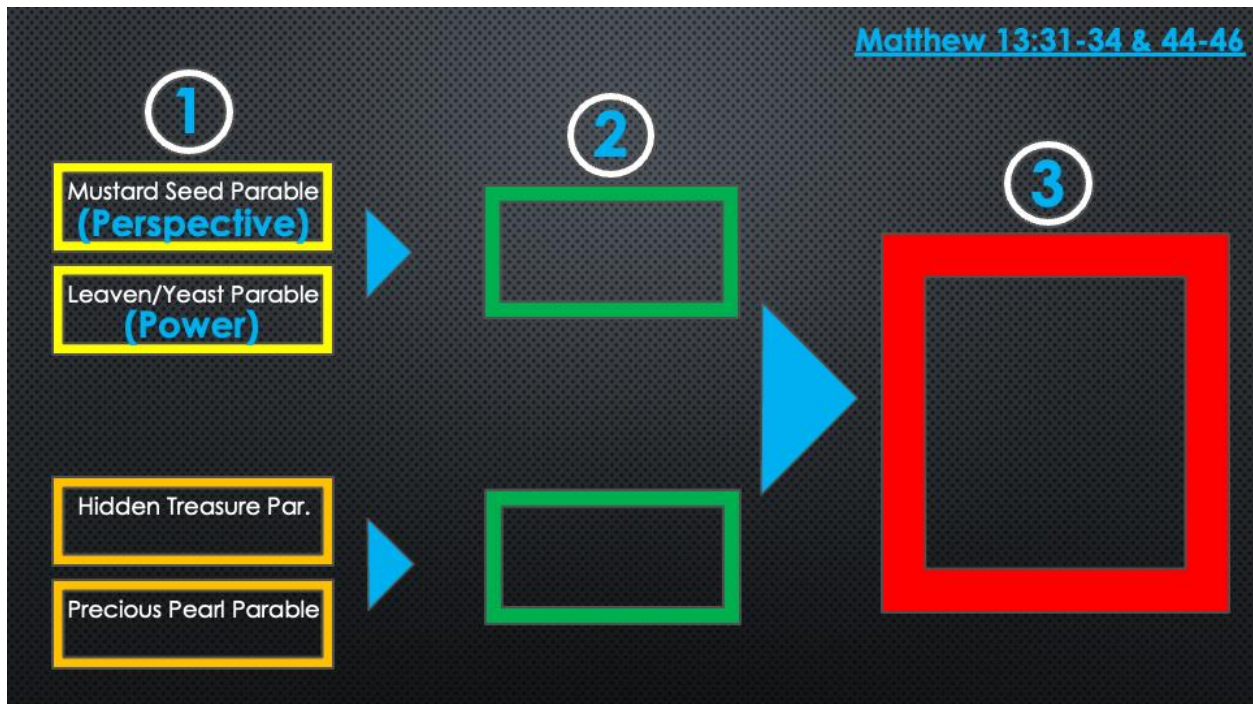


Let's look at our 2<sup>nd</sup>... Parable of the Leaven/Yeast

Matthew 13:33

**33** He told them another parable. *“The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”*

- ~ Don't forget the character of the parable...
- ~ See POWER of the kingdom to penetrate & permeate
- ~ See the shocking truth in the simple & ordinary...
- ~ See the transformative power in the WHOLE/ALL...
  - > Transforms ALL of the Head, Heart, & Hands
  - > Transforms ALL the world: local, regional, global
  - > Transforms via ALL of God's Word, will, & ways!



OK... because we know per the Scripture's structure that these 2 parables are a pair/couplet, let's unify them and gain clarity...

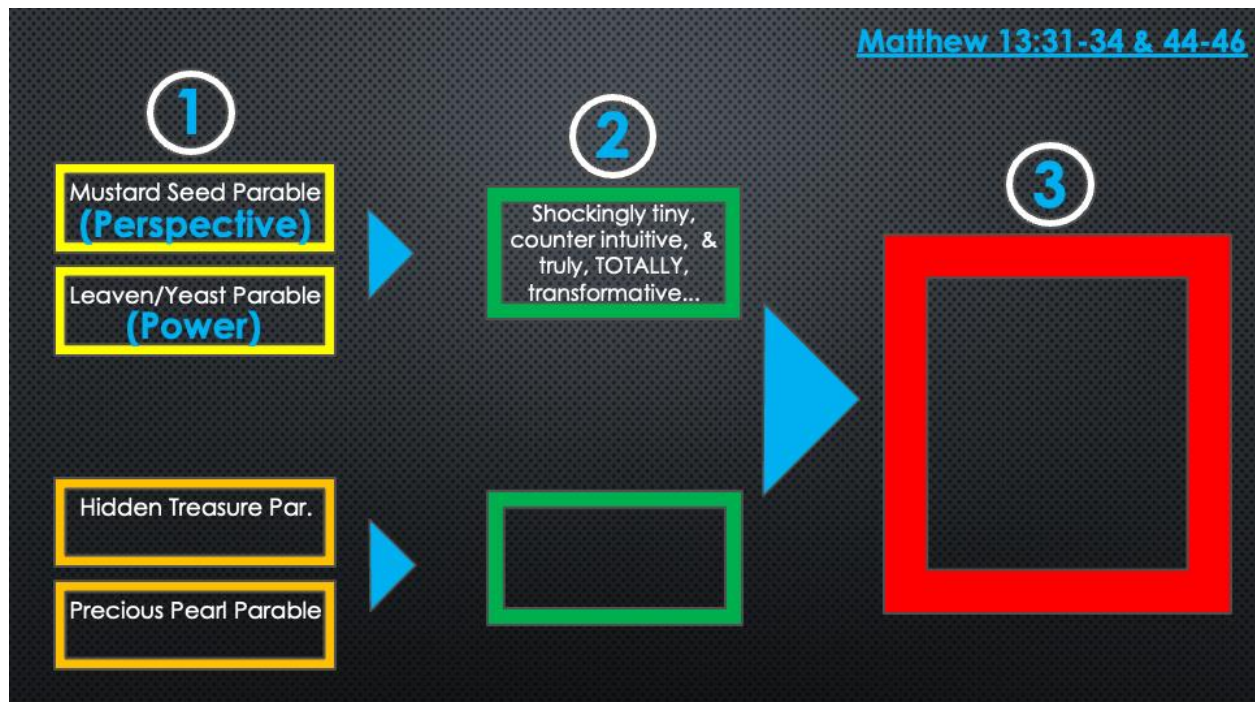
## NOTE:

- ~ *Tiny, wee-little impression but impressive impact!*
- ~ Shocking & convicting, simple truths that transform...
- ~ Both are VERY counter cultural & counter intuitive...

### Isaiah 55:8-9

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.*

- 9 *For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

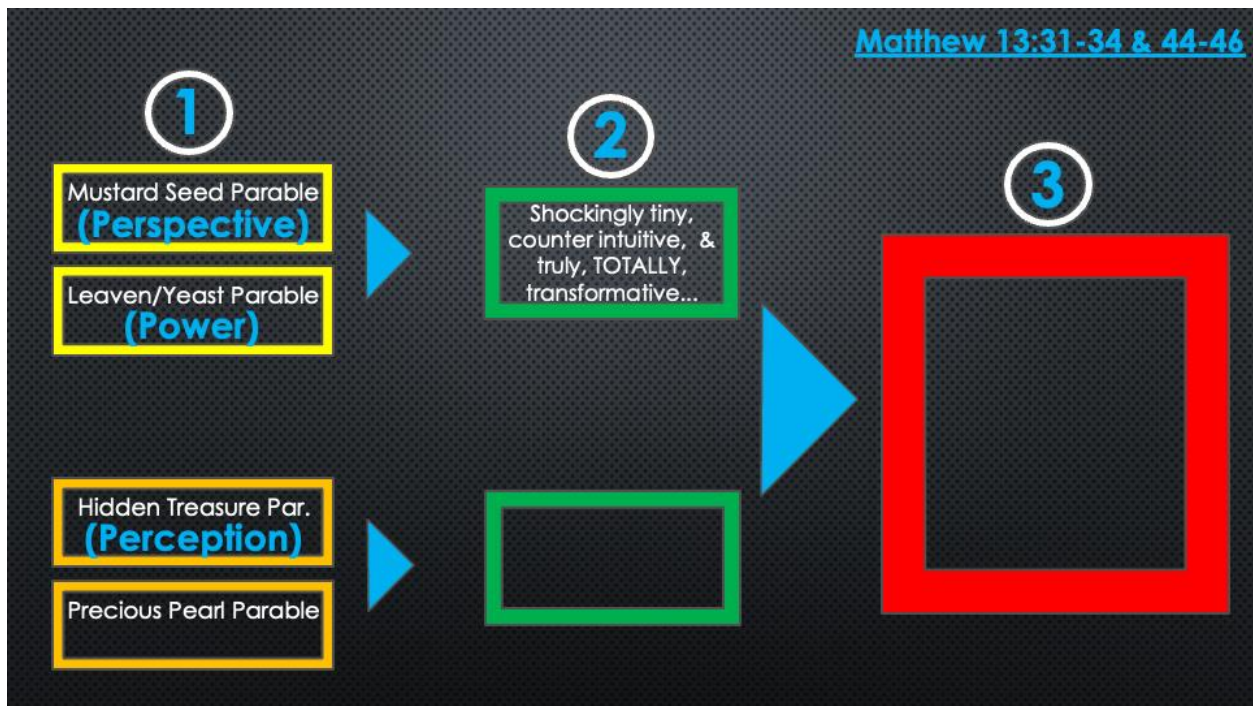


Time for parable #3

Matthew 13:44

**44** "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

- ~ What's your PERCEPTION of truth... & its treasure?
- ~ What do you want?      What/Who do you treasure?
- ~ Do you see, hear, love, & trust truth... as treasure?
- ~ Do you know & understand God's truth & treasure?
- ~ **Do you realize that a little truth is a lot of treasure?**
- ~ What price/sacrifice are you willing to pay/give???



Now for our 4<sup>th</sup> & final parable...

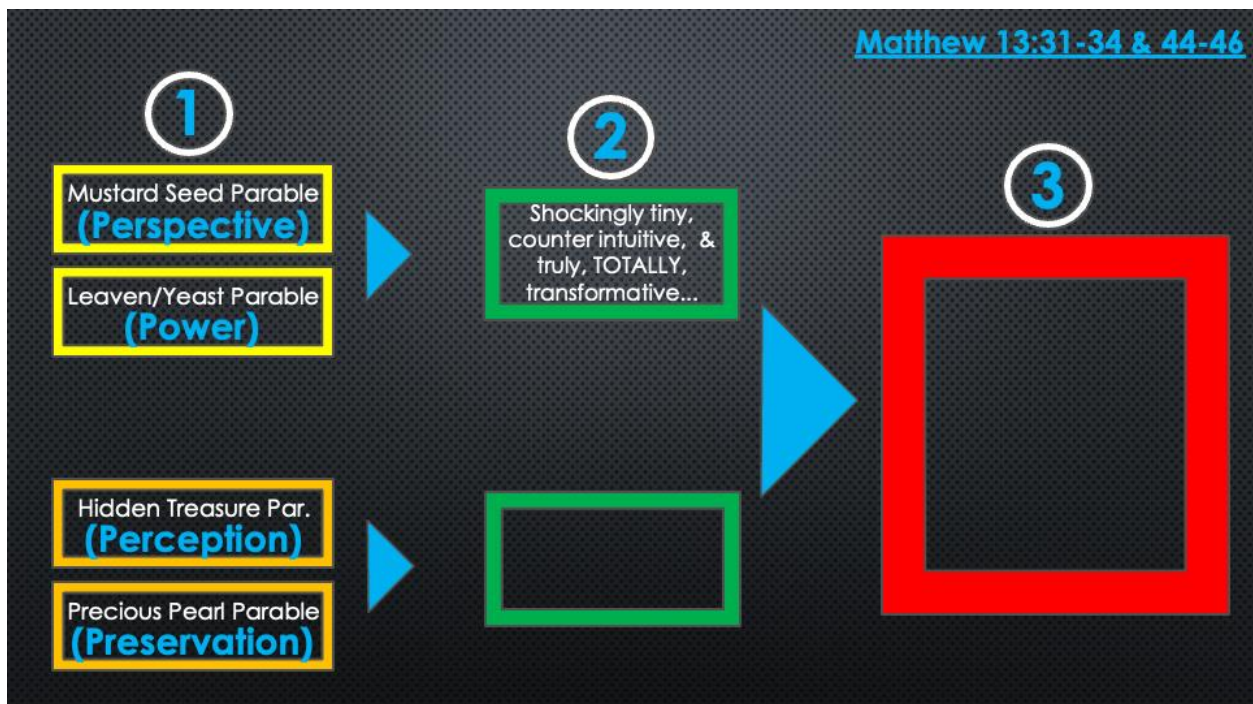
[Matthew 13:45-46](#)

**45**“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, **46**who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

- ~ Pearls are precious... the wise PRESERVE them!
- ~ Pearls are born out of pressure & adversity...
- ~ Pearls are unified... or broken
- ~ Pearls can take a lot of work to find
- ~ Pearls, at first glance, in their shells, are not pretty.  
(cf. Revelation ch.2-3)
- ~ Pearls come at a high cost...

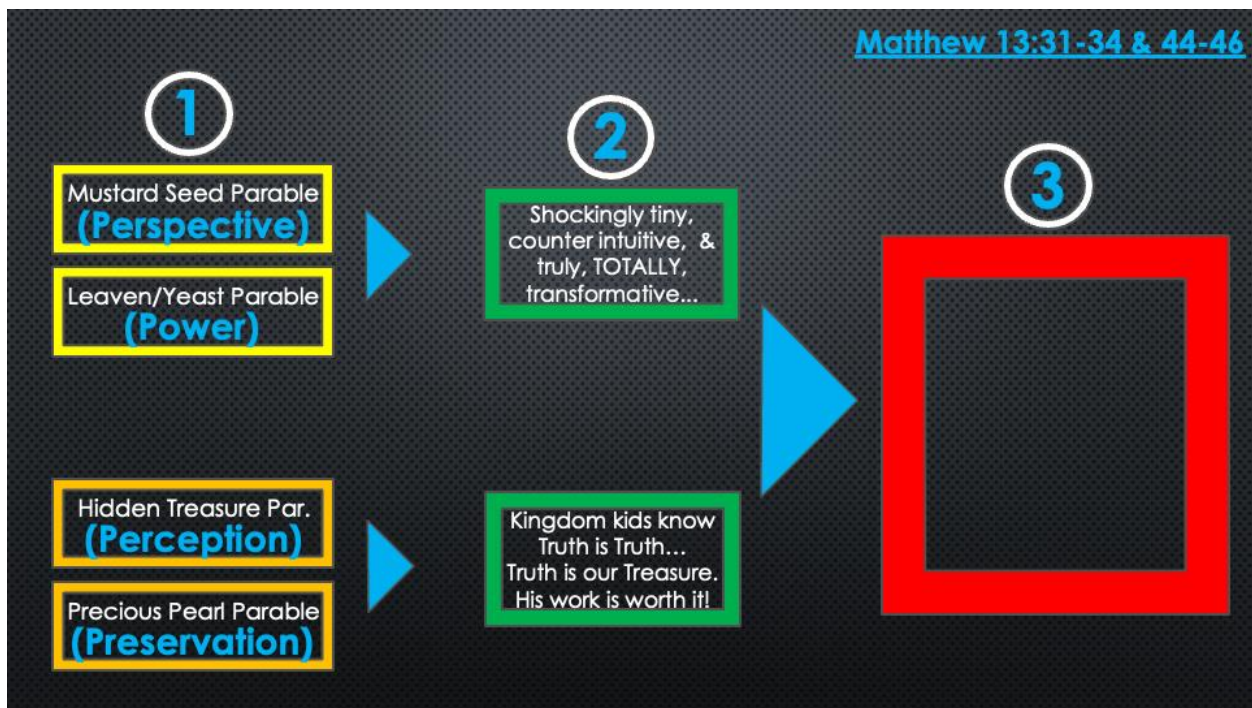
Matthew 7:6

*“...Do not throw your pearls to/before pigs... lest they turn & attack you”*



In the same way that our 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> parables were a pair...  
So are the 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup>... So what are they teaching us?

- ~ Truth is Truth! Truth is treasure!
- ~ It only takes a tiny truth to acquire true treasure!
- ~ What we treasure & cherish we'll work/sacrifice for!
- ~ Christians know the kingdom's value is worth our all!
- ~ *Both people gave up ALL to acquire what they wanted!*



*Now that we have explained all 4 parables & unified the 2 pairs/couplets... It's time to bring everything together and apply the **Perspective, Power, Perception, & Preservation principles** to our understanding of the kingdom of God...*

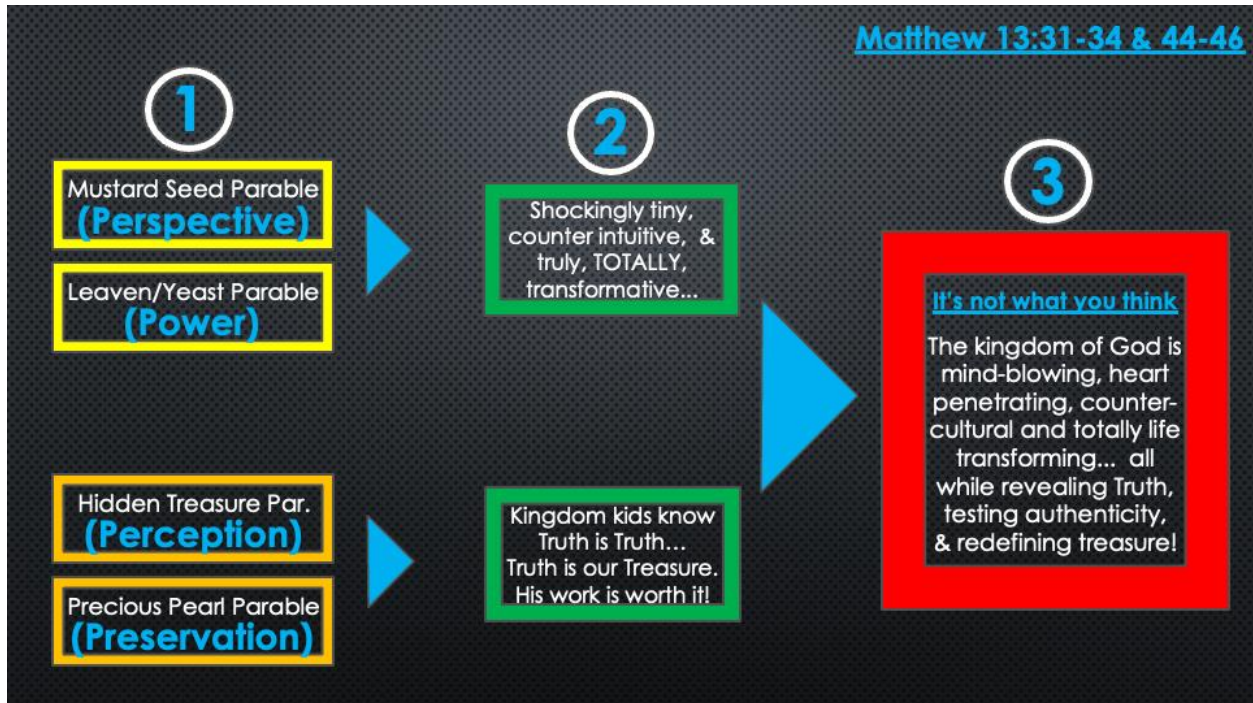
**REVIEW:**

## If you want to understand the kingdom of God...

1. You need to see, hear, love, & obey with miraculous, born again and biblical eyes, ears, hearts, & attitudes!
2. You need to believe & trust the gospel's power to penetrate, permeate, & totally transform your life.
3. You need to realize & respond to the true treasure that is THE Truth, His name is Jesus, and He alone can set you free (if and only if & when you truly treasure Him above anything & everything else).
4. You need to worship, walk, work, and witness in the context of a war... never forgetting that the pearl of the kingdom & the Prince of Peace is worth every ounce of effort & every thing of value you have or will ever have!

### CLOSE:

*Most people are **clueless & Christless** when it comes to the kingdom of God!*



- ~ The kingdom of God is **MIND-BLOWING!**  
If it doesn't blow your mind, you don't get it!
- ~ The kingdom of God is **HEART-PENETRATING!**  
If it doesn't permeate your heart, you don't get it!
- ~ The kingdom of God is **COUNTER-CULTURAL!**  
If it doesn't make you counter cultural, you don't get it!
- ~ The kingdom of God is **LIFE-TRANSFORMING!**  
If it hasn't radically transformed your life, you don't get it!
- ~ The kingdom of God is **TRUTH...**  
If you don't trust its Truth & truth, you don't get it!
- ~ The kingdom of God is a **TEST...**  
If you don't pass the kingdom's testing... you don't get it!
- ~ The kingdom of God is an eternal **TREASURE!**  
If you don't cherish the King's treasure... you don't get it!

Friend,

*There are tiny & triumphant,  
defining truths that reveal &  
reflect the gigantic heart of  
God AND His glorious  
kingdom.*

Those who have ears to hear,  
let them hear!

## **PRAYER**

**WORSHIP:** *Miracle Power* by We The Kingdom

# RESEARCH Study Notes:

## Expositor's Bible Commentary -

### Matthew

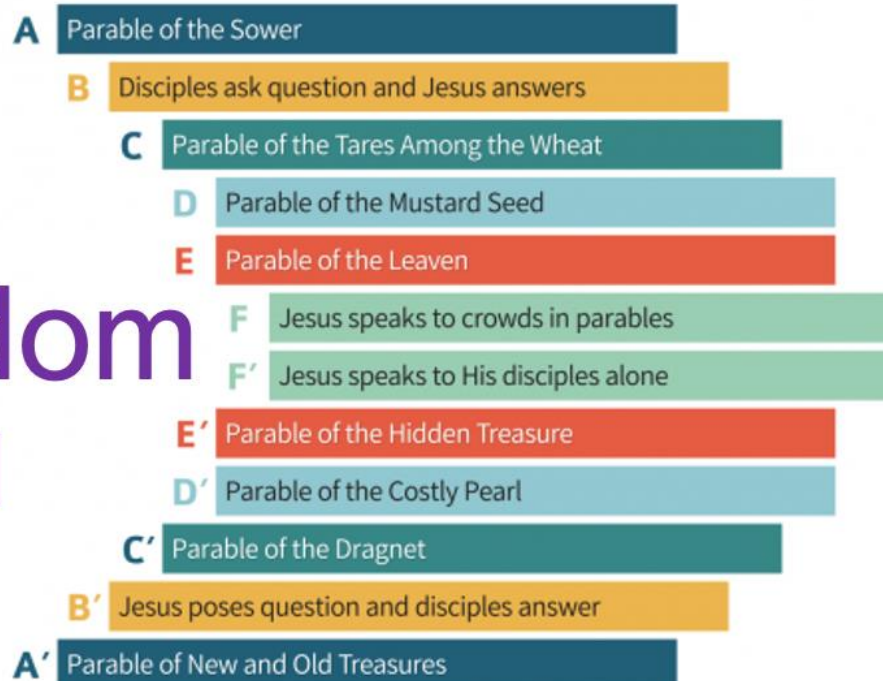
Ch. 13

# The Kingdom of God

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(D.A. Carson)



## *The parable of the mustard seed (13:31–32)*

**31–32** Close comparison with Mark 4:30–32 and Luke 13:18 suggests that Matthew may have slightly modified the Q form of this parable under Mark's influence. Yet it is easy to exaggerate the differences. (See discussion and chart at Mt 19:1–2.) Many have held that in Mark the contrast in size is of greatest importance, in Luke the process of growth, and that Matthew has conflated the two ideas. Such distinctions are too finely drawn: if size were for Mark the most important factor, one wonders why Mark's Jesus would choose a plant that reaches a height of only ten to twelve feet.

There is a better interpretation. **In all three Gospels the parable begins with a mustard seed** (for the introductory formula and the verb *parethēken* ["he

told”], see on v. 24). **This seed is designated “the smallest of all your seeds,” but it becomes “the largest of garden plants”** (*meizon tōn lachanōn*, v. 32; cf. Notes).

In rabbinical thought the mustard seed was proverbial for smallness

(cf. *M Niddah* 5:2; cf. *SBK*, 1:669).

**It becomes a tree, large in comparison with the tiny seed, large enough for birds to perch in its branches (Matt; Luke) or in its shade (Mark).**

*The image recalls OT passages that picture a great kingdom as a large tree with birds flocking to its branches (Judg 9:15; Ezek 17:22–24; 31:3–14; Dan 4:7–23).*

But if the greatness of the kingdom is in view,

why a mustard plant?

*The contrast in size between seed and plant does not itself establish the greatness of the kingdom;*

and, contrary to Kingsbury (*Parables*, p. 81) and Huffmann (p. 211), it is doubtful whether Jesus' point is that the kingdom grows supernaturally.

Instead...

**the point is  
the organic unity of  
small beginning and  
mature end**

(cf. Dahl, *Jesus in Memory*, pp. 155–56).

No pious Jew doubted that the kingdom would come and that it would be vast and glorious.

*What Jesus is teaching goes beyond that: he is saying that there is a basic connection between the small beginnings*

*taking place under his ministry  
and the kingdom in  
its future glory.*

Though the initial  
appearance of the  
kingdom may seem  
inconsequential, the tiny  
seed leads to the  
mature plant.

**We can now see why Jesus chose  
the mustard seed.**

*For Jesus it was not essential to stress the greatness of the future kingdom; few would dispute that. It was more important for him to find a metaphor emphasizing the kingdom's tiny beginning.*

**Jacques Dupont** ("Le couple parabolique du seneve et du levain: Mt 13, 31–33, Le 13, 18–21," in Strecker, *Jesus Christus*, pp. 331–45) has suggested another reason for this metaphor. He **convincingly shows that the parables of the mustard seed and of the yeast**, linked in Matthew and Luke but only the first occurring in Mark, actually **belonged together** from the beginning. He argues that Mark has structural reasons for dropping the parable of the yeast, and so his silence is scarcely determinative. But **one of the links he finds between the two parables is the incongruity of both metaphors.**

He quotes authors who find the mustard plant an incongruous or even bizarre symbol for the kingdom, while everyone knows that yeast normally symbolizes evil

(see further on v. 33). But that, Dupont says (pp. 344–45), is just the point.

In both parables the strange choice of images evokes surprise, encourages the reader to penetrate the parable's meaning, and accords with other parables designed to jar the unthinking (e.g., the coming of the kingdom is like the coming of a thief in the night [24:43]).

## Notes

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- 31 The construction ὃν λαβὼν ἄνθρωπος ἔσπειρεν (*hon labōn anthrōpos espeiren*, lit., “which having taken a man sowed”) represents a Semitic auxiliary construction and occurs only here in the NT and at 13:33, 44; Luke 12:37; 13:19, 21.
- 32 The word μεῖζον (*meizon*, “the largest”) is neuter and is therefore in agreement with τὸ σίναπι (*to sinapi*, “mustard,” “mustard plant”) rather than ὁ κόκκος (*ho kokkos*, “seed”). There is no smooth way of translating the anomaly.
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## ***The parable of the yeast*** (13:33)

The general thrust of this parable is the same as that of the mustard seed.

***The kingdom produces ultimate consequences out of all proportion to its insignificant beginnings.***

Efforts by most dispensationalists (e.g., Walvoord) to interpret the yeast as a symbol for evil are not very convincing in this setting because they require the introduction of anachronistic ideas like “the professing church.”

Moreover...

**though yeast is *normally* associated with evil in the OT, this is *not always* so (cf. Lev 7:13; 23:15–18).**

**Metaphors may have diverse uses:**

***the lion at different times symbolizes both Satan and Jesus.***

In any case the anomalous metaphor is here best explained along the lines suggested by Dupont (on Mt 13:31–32).

If there is a distinction  
between this parable and the  
last one, it is that the mustard  
seed suggests extensive  
growth and the yeast intensive  
transformation.

The **yeast** doesn't grow, it  
permeates

and its inevitable effect, despite the small quantity used, recalls Jesus' words in 5:13.

*In both parables it is clear that at present the kingdom of heaven operates, not apocalyptically, but quietly and from small beginnings.*

44: “The Kingdom was inaugurated without display or pomp; its silent, secret character must have surprised those who were zealously impatient for its expected manifestation in power and glory” (Hill, *Matthew*).

## Notes

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33 The phrase εἰς ἀλεύρου σάτα τρία (*eis aleouros sata tria*, “into three satas of flour”) is anomalous (an anarthrous noun that depends on a preposition is normally placed before a case governed by it) but not unprecedented (cf. BDF, par. 474 [4]).

Far more difficult is the expression σάτα τρία (*sata tria*, “three satas”). NIV has “a large amount of flour,” which is time enough; but it is not an unreasonable amount of flour, adopted for parabolic purpose, since the same amount was mixed by Sarah in Genesis 18:6. It probably represents the largest amount of flour a woman might make up into bread at one time. But how much is it? The NIV margin specifies “about 1/2 bushel or 22 liters.” In fact, the standard reference works (including ISBE; EBC, 1:609–10 et al.) adopt an unrecognized and conflicting pair of computations leading to mutually exclusive results. If one follows OT ratios and equivalences, τὸ σάτον (*to saton*) = Aram. סַתָּא (*sā'tā*) = Heb. סֵאָה (*sē'āh*) = 1/3 of an ephah or bath. Therefore three satas, as here, equal 1 ephah, known to be 1/10 of a homer.

Now an ephah (or bath) is normally reckoned at about 22 liters. Measurements were imprecise in the ancient world, ranging substantially in place and time (cf. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, p. 32). That this estimate is approximately correct has been confirmed by an archaeological find that has measured what is almost certainly a “bath” jar and found it to have the capacity of about 21 liters (David Ussishkin, “Excavations at Tel Lachish—1973–1977,” *Tel Aviv*: 5 [1978]: 87, n. 9. I am indebted to Hugh G.M. Williamson for this reference.). This agrees with the NIV margin. But Josephus (*Antiq.* IX, 85 [iv.5]) and other Jewish sources (cf. SBK, 1:669–70) establish that one *saton* = 1/2 *modii*, where 1 *modius* = 16 sextarii = approx. 8.75 liters (confirmed by *Jos. Antiq.* VIII, 57 [ii. 9], which says a bath contains 72 sextarii); and in that case 3 sata (as in Matt 13:33) = 1.5 × 3 × 8.75 = approx. 39.4 liters—a long way from the 22 suggested by the alternative computation. Both approaches are unwittingly juxtaposed in the standard reference works (cf. Douglas, *Illustrated Dictionary*, 3:1637–39; IDB, 4:833–35), though the writer in the former mentions in passing that “the bath is variously calculated between 20.92 and 46.6 litres.” The matter has not been finally resolved. D.J. Wiseman, in a private communication (2 December 1980), suggests that the solution may be analogous to the “greater” and “lesser” (half) weights measures (cf. the approximately double “royal bath”).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, “[Matthew](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 317–320.

## *The parable of the hidden treasure* (13:44)

For the way these parables relate to the structure of the chapter, see on vv. 10–17.

*The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl are a pair; and pairing is not uncommon in Matthew* (e.g., 5:14b–16; 6:26–30; 7:6; 9:16–17; 10:24–25; 12:25; 13:31–33; 24:43–51), *an excellent way of reinforcing a point. Like the paired parables with which these two are chiastically coordinated (**mustard seed and yeast, 13:31–33**), these two make the same general point but have significant individual emphases.*

Unlike the parables earlier in the chapter, these two do not deal so much with the hidden, inaugurated form of the kingdom and the concomitant delay of the Parousia as with the superlative worth of the kingdom of heaven.

Yet even here the previous eschatological structure underlies them; for in traditional Jewish apocalyptic, one could scarcely liken the kingdom to a man finding a treasure or buying a pearl: the kingdom was to come apocalyptically at the end of the age by an act of God alone. In contrast to this, some kind of realized or inaugurated eschatology is here presupposed.

44 On the “is like” language, see on v. 24.

The kingdom is not simply like a treasure, but its situation is like the situation of a treasure hidden in a field.

The Greek articles are generic (cf. Turner, *Syntax*, p. 179). Finding the treasure appears to be by chance. In a land as frequently ravaged as Palestine, many people doubtless buried their treasures; but, as Huffman (p. 213) points out, actually

***to find a treasure would happen once in a thousand lifetimes. Thus, the extravagance of the parable dramatizes the supreme importance of the kingdom.***

Derrett (*Law*, pp. 1–16) has pointed out that under rabbinic law if a workman came on a treasure in a field and lifted it out, it would belong to his master, the field's owner; but here the man is careful not to lift the treasure out till he has bought the field. So the parable deals with neither the legality nor the morality of the situation (as with the parable of the thief in the night) but with the value of the treasure, which is worth every sacrifice. When the man buys the field at such sacrifice, he possesses far more than the price paid (cf. 10:39).

The kingdom of heaven is worth infinitely more than the cost of discipleship, and those who know where the treasure lies joyfully abandon everything else to secure it.

### **Two alternative interpretations must be dismissed.**

1. The first, represented by Walvoord, understands the treasure to represent Israel and Jesus as the man who sold everything to purchase her. He rejects the above view by making the parable mean that "a believer in Christ has nothing to offer and the treasure is not for sale" and proposes his own interpretation by noting that in Exodus 19:5 Israel is called God's treasure. But any view, including Walvoord's, can be made to look foolish by pressing a parable into a detailed allegory: for instance one could rebut his view by showing that it entails Israel's being worth far more than the price paid. But would Walvoord be comfortable with this implicit depreciation of Christ's sacrifice? He must come to grips with the nature of parables (see on 13:3a). And treasure has a vast range of associations in the OT and NT; on what basis does he

select Exodus 19:5? Above all, his interpretation does not adequately handle the opening clause.

2. J.D. Crossan (*Finding Is the First Act* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], esp. pp. 93ff.) argues that “sold all he had” must be taken so absolutely that “all” includes the parable itself. One must give up the parable itself and, in abandoning all, abandon even abandonment. The parable is therefore a paradox, like the sign that reads “Do not read this sign.” Crossan’s interpretation is unacceptable for exegetical, literary, historical, and theological reasons: exegetical, in that this parable does not speak of “abandoning” or “giving up” things but of “selling,” and one cannot imagine giving the parable away by selling it; literary, in that Crossan, like Walvoord, fastens on one word and rides it so hard that the nature of parables is overlooked; historical, in that ascription of such existentialist results to Jesus or to Matthew is so anachronistic as to make a historian wince; theological, in that his interpretation of “paradox” is defective and is used in undifferentiated ways. Crossan oscillates between paradox construed as a merely formal contradiction and paradox construed as antinomy or even incoherence.

## *The parable of the expensive pearl* (13:45–46)

45–46 The word *palin* (“again”) ties this parable fairly closely to the preceding one (cf. 5:33).

Walvoord recognizes that this parable is roughly equivalent to the last. But here, he says, the pearl represents not Israel but the church. The church, like the pearl, is formed organically; and “there is a sense in which the church was formed out of the wounds of Christ.” This does not take us much beyond patristic allegorizing.

The real connection with  
the last parable is the  
supreme worth of  
the kingdom.

But here we deal with a merchant whose business it is to seek pearls, and who chances on one of supreme value. Derrett (*Law*, p. 15) sees

**a rabbinic parallel:**

*“One wins eternal life after a struggle of  
years, another finds it in one hour”*

*(Abodah Zarah):*

contrast the conversions  
of Saul and the Ethiopian eunuch.

*Unlike the man in the last parable, the merchant, though he sells everything he has to purchase the pearl, apparently pays a full price.*

**Although he is an expert in pearls, this single find so far surpasses any other pearl the merchant has ever seen that he considers it a fair exchange for everything else he owns.**

*Thus, Jesus is not interested in religious efforts or in affirming that one can “buy” the kingdom; on the contrary, he is saying that the person whose whole life has been bound up with “pearls”—the entire religious heritage of the Jews?—will, on comprehending the true value of the kingdom as Jesus presents it, gladly exchange all else to follow him.*

## Notes

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45–46 There is no obvious explanation for the change from present tense (v. 44) to aorist (vv. 46–49), but the latter are not gnomic but narrative (Moule, *Idiom Book*, p. 13). The perfect πέπρακεν (*pepraken*, “sold”) with obvious aorist force is probably not an early instance of the later use of the perfect in narrative but a tense chosen because there is no aorist active form for this verb. For discussion, cf. Zerwick, par. 289; Moulton, *Prolegomena*, pp. 142–46; Turner, *Syntax*, p. 70; RHG, p. 897; BDF, pars. 343–44.

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## Warren Weirsbe’s “BE Commentary”

### *The mustard seed—false growth* (vv. 31–32).

In the East, the mustard seed symbolizes something small and insignificant. It produces a large plant, but not a “tree” in the strictest sense. However, the plant is large enough for birds to sit in the branches.

Since Jesus did not explain this parable, we must use what He did explain in the other parables to find its meaning.

**The birds in the Parable of the Sower represented Satan** (Matt. 13:19). Passages like Daniel 4:12 and Ezekiel 17:23 indicate that a tree is a symbol of a world power.

These facts suggest that...

*the parable teaches an abnormal growth of the kingdom of heaven,*

*one that makes it possible for  
Satan to work in it.*

Certainly “Christendom” has become a worldwide power with a complex organization of many branches. What started in a humble manner today boasts of material possessions and political influences.

Some make this parable teach the worldwide success of the Gospel. But that would contradict what Jesus taught in the first parable.

If anything, the New Testament teaches a growing decline in the ministry of the Gospel as the end of the age draws near.

**The leaven**—false doctrine (v. 33).

*The mustard seed illustrates the false outward expansion of the kingdom, while the leaven illustrates the inward development of false doctrine and false living.*

Throughout the Bible, leaven is a symbol of evil. It had to be removed from the Jewish homes during Passover (Ex. 12:15–19; 13:7). It was excluded from the sacrifices (Ex. 34:35), with the exception of the loaves used at the Feast of Pentecost (Lev. 23:15–21). But there the loaves symbolized Jews and Gentiles in the church, and there is sin in the church.

Jesus used leaven to picture hypocrisy (Luke 12:1), false teaching (Matt. 16:6–12), and worldly compromise (Matt. 22:16–21). Paul used leaven to picture carnality in the church (1 Cor. 5:6–8) as well as false doctrine (Gal. 5:9). Sin is like leaven (yeast): It quietly grows, it corrupts, and it “puffs up” (1 Cor. 4:18–19; 5:2; 8:1). It would seem that making the growth of the leaven a picture of the spread of the Gospel throughout the world would violate the meaning of this important symbol. It would also contradict the other parables.

**Satan has worked hard to introduce  
false doctrine and false living into  
the ministry of the Word of God.**

From the very early days of the church,  
true believers have battled false  
doctrine and hypocrisy.

**How sad it is that some churches and schools that were once true to the Word have turned from the truth to fables.**

***“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good”***  
is sound counsel (**1 Thes. 5:21**).

The kingdom of heaven began with the sowing of the Word of God in the hearts of men. Much of the seed did not bear fruit; but some was fruitful. Satan opposed the work of God by sowing counterfeit Christians, by encouraging a false growth, and by introducing false doctrine. It would seem that Satan is winning! But the test is at *the end* of the age, not *during* the age.<sup>2</sup>

## The Outcome of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:44–50)

### *The hidden treasure* (v. 44).

The common interpretation of this parable is that the sinner finds Christ and gives up all that he possesses to gain Him and be saved. But this interpretation presents several problems. To begin with, Jesus Christ is not a hidden treasure. He is perhaps the best-known Person of history. In the second place, the sinner cannot “find Christ” for he is blind and stubborn (Rom. 3:10ff). It is the Saviour who finds the lost sinner (Luke 19:10). And no sinner could ever *purchase* salvation! Please note that the man in the parable did not purchase the treasure; he purchased *the whole field*. “The field is the world” (Matt. 13:38). Must the lost sinner purchase the world to gain Christ? Does he hide Him again?

Once again, Old Testament symbolism assists us in our interpretation. The treasure is the nation of Israel (Ex. 19:5; Ps. 135:4). 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. Jesus Christ gave His all to purchase the whole world in order to save the nation (John 11:51). On the cross, Jesus died for the whole world; but in a special way, He died for Israel (Isa. 53:8). The nation suffered judgment and seeming destruction, but in God’s sight it is “hidden” and will be revealed again in glory.

There is, then, a future for Israel. Politically, the nation was reborn on May 14, 1948. But the nation is far from what it ought to be spiritually. God sees Israel as His treasure, and one day He will establish her in her glorious kingdom.

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<sup>2</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [\*The Bible Exposition Commentary\*](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 46.

## *The pearl of great price* (vv. 45–46).

A well-known Gospel song perpetuates the interpretation that this pearl is Jesus Christ and His salvation. But the same objections apply to this interpretation as applied to the previous parable. The sinner does not find Christ; Christ finds the sinner. No sinner is able to pay for salvation, even though he sells all that he has.

The pearl represents the church. The Bible makes a distinction between Jews, Gentiles, and the church (1 Cor. 10:32). Today, the church, the body of Christ, is composed of believing Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:11ff). Unlike most other gems, the pearl is a *unity*—it cannot be carved like a diamond or emerald. The church is a unity (Eph. 4:4–6), even though the professing church on earth is divided. Like a pearl, the church is the product of suffering. Christ died for the church (Eph. 5:25) and His suffering on the cross made possible her birth.

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, for 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 (waters in the Bible represent nations, Dan. 7:1–3; Rev. 13:1; 17:15) and one day will be revealed in its beauty.

So, in spite of Satan’s subtle working in this world, Christ is forming His church. He sold all that He had to purchase His church, and nothing Satan can do will cause Him to fail. There is but one church, a pearl of great price, though there are many local churches. Not everyone who is a member of a local church belongs to the one church, the body of Christ. It is only through repentance and faith in Christ that we become a part of His church. Of course, all true believers ought to identify with a local assembly where they can worship and serve.

## MacArthur Bible Commentary Notes:

### *The mustard seed* (13:31, 32)

**13:32 a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.** Palestinian mustard plants are large shrubs, sometimes up to fifteen feet high, certainly large enough for birds to lodge in. This verse refers undoubtedly to several OT passages, including Ezekiel 17:23; 31:6; Daniel 4:21—passages that prophesied the inclusion of Gentiles in the kingdom.

## The leaven (13:33)

**13:33** *The kingdom of heaven is like leaven.* Here the kingdom is pictured as yeast, multiplying quietly and permeating all that it contacts. The lesson is the same as the parable of the mustard seed. Some interpreters suggest that since leaven nearly always symbolizes evil in Scripture (*see note on Mark 8:15*) it must connote evil here as well. They make the leaven some evil influence inside the kingdom, but that twists Jesus' actual words and violates the context, in which Jesus is repeatedly describing the kingdom itself as the pervading influence.

### Kingdom Parables in Matthew 13

1. The Sower	13:1–23	The good news of the gospel will be rejected by most people.
2. The Wheat and the Tares	13:24–30, 36–43	People with genuine faith and people with a false profession of faith will coexist between Christ's two advents.
3. The Mustard Seed	13:31, 32	Christendom will grow quickly from a meager beginning and will include Gentiles.
4. The Leaven	13:33–35	Kingdom influence will permeate the world.
5. The Hidden Treasure	13:44	The gospel is a priceless treasure.
6. The Pearl of Great Price	13:45, 46	True believers are willing to give up their all for the priceless gospel.
7. The Dragnet	13:47–50	Angels will separate the wicked from the righteous at Christ's Second Coming.

**The hidden treasure (13:44) & The pearl of great price (13:45, 46)**

*These two parables have identical meanings. Both picture salvation as something hidden from most people but so valuable that people who have it revealed to them are willing to give up all they have to possess it.<sup>3</sup>*

**St. Andrews Expositor's Commentary: (R.C. Sproul)**

**THE MUSTARD SEED AND THE LEAVEN**

**W**e are in the midst of a section of Matthew's Gospel that records a number of Jesus' parables that all begin with the words "The kingdom of heaven is like ..." **I would have expected Jesus to compare the kingdom to grand and glorious things.** He might have said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mighty mountain range in its strength" or "The kingdom of heaven is like the ocean in its width and depth."

**Instead, He chose to compare it to unexpectedly ordinary things.**

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<sup>3</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., [\*The MacArthur Bible Commentary\*](#) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), Mt 13:31–46.

The two short parables I want to consider in this chapter are both cases in point—Jesus compared the kingdom to mustard seeds and to leaven. At first glance, these seem very odd choices for comparison to the kingdom of God, but with some reflection, we can see the genius behind the comparisons.

Matthew tells us: *Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds”* (vv. 31–32a).

**Critics** have jumped all over this statement from Jesus in recent years, using it to question the authority and infallibility of the Bible, as well as the reliability of the teaching of Jesus. Here, they **say, is an instance where not only Scripture but Jesus Himself committed a grievous error.** What is this terrible error? Jesus said the mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds, but **we know that there are seeds that are smaller than the mustard seed.**

However, before we all throw our Bibles into the garbage over the relative size of a seed, I want to make sure we do not miss the point of what Jesus is saying. We can put seeds into three categories—seeds that are small, seeds that are smaller, and seeds that are smallest. The mustard seed belongs in the third category, in the category of the superlative degree of smallness. It is certainly one of the smallest of all seeds, even if it is not *the* smallest.

**But...**

Jesus referred to it as the smallest because He was employing the literary device known as hyperbole, the intentional use of exaggeration to make a point. He did this frequently throughout His ministry.

**We hear, read, and even use hyperbole all the time with no qualms at all. For instance, when a professional sports team wins a championship and returns home, the team typically is given a victory parade through its home city. On such occasions, the local newspapers are apt to write, “The whole city turned out to welcome the team.” No one cancels his subscription to the newspaper when he reads that, thinking the paper is guilty of intentional inaccuracy.**

Any sentient human being who reads such a report understands that the writer is making a point by saying “the whole city.” He does not mean that every last person in the city came to the parade, merely that a large number of the residents attended.

Jesus was telling His listeners that the kingdom He had come to announce and inaugurate was very small at that moment. Jesus and His disciples comprised the entire citizenry.

Compared to the other religions and cults in the Roman empire at that time—the gods and goddesses of the pantheon of Rome, the cult of Mithras, the mystery religions that abounded in the Mediterranean region (all of which have vanished from the face of the earth),

*the kingdom of heaven  
appeared insignificant.  
It was so small, it was nearly  
invisible. That was His point  
in comparing the kingdom  
to a mustard seed.*

### ***Small but Growing***

However, Jesus added, **“but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches”** (v. 32b). It was as if Jesus was saying: “Yes, the kingdom is minute now. But wait. The mustard seed can barely be seen when it is put in the earth, but then it begins to grow and expand until it becomes a tree that is large enough for birds to use as a nesting place. So will the kingdom of God be.

In the late 1990s, my wife, Vesta, and I were hosting a Bible study in our home. Fewer than ten people attended regularly. However, one night after the Bible study, some of the people came to me and said, “R. C., why don’t we start a church and have you be the minister?” I laughed. I said: “I have a day job. In fact, I have two of them, teaching fulltime in seminary and working full-time at Ligonier Ministries. There are only so many full-time jobs that you can have if you’re one person. I’m sorry, but that’s just not an option.” They said, “Well, will you at least pray about it?” That’s what you say to a person when you ask him to do something and he says no. I agreed, and the more I prayed and thought about it, the more I realized how empty my life seemed because I was involved only in the teaching ministry of the truth of God and not in preaching the Word on a regular basis to a congregation. So, a week later, when our Bible study met again, they

asked me whether I had prayed about it and was willing to do it, and I told them I would if I could be responsible only for the preaching and teaching, allowing others to handle pastoral care so I would have time for my other responsibilities. I also told them: “Let’s not call it a church. Instead, let’s call it a chapel, because we have to keep it small.” So, St. Andrew’s Chapel was started with about thirty charter members.

There is a rule in the business world that when people plan what they are going to do, they tend to radically overestimate what they can accomplish in a year but radically underestimate what they can accomplish in five years. I had no idea what would happen with St. Andrew’s Chapel five and ten years down the road, but we have since built a sanctuary, outgrown it, and built another. We have more than a thousand members. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine anything like this. Finally, in 2011, I suggested that we drop the word *chapel* from the name because, despite my intentions, it would not stay small.

The growth of St. Andrew’s does not amount to a blip on the timeline of church history. In cosmic terms, its growth is insignificant. Yet, it reflects the truth of what Jesus said. Though it began small, it has grown beyond my wildest imagination. That is what **Jesus was telling His disciples**—that

the kingdom of heaven would become something they could not imagine.

**If we consider the condition of the kingdom of God from the perspective of twenty-first-century Western culture, it can seem to be declining rather than growing.**

*In Western Europe, the average attendance at Sunday morning worship services is about two percent of the population. The great cathedrals have become, in the words of the skeptics, the mausoleums of a God who is dead.*

**Historians say the United States has entered the post-Christian era, and that Christianity, if it is not dead, is irrelevant. The federal government of the United States has declared independence from God, interpreting separation of church and state to mean the autonomy of the state from God. So, the things of God are banished from the public square, from the schools, from the halls of Congress, and from the courts. The church seems to be forgotten unless there is a national catastrophe along the lines of the 9/11 terrorist attacks; then the churches are revisited for a little while until the panic subsides.**

But we cannot get a real picture of the health of Christianity in the twenty-first century by looking at the West. We have to look elsewhere. The kingdom of heaven is experiencing explosive growth in places such as China, Korea, Japan, South America, Eastern Europe, Australia, and many places in Africa. In many of these locations, Christianity has become the dominant influence on the culture—just as it has been in the West for two thousand years.

I was reminded of this a few years ago when I visited the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, one of my favorite museums in the world. It has the largest Rembrandt collection of any museum. Among Rembrandt's paintings, and indeed among all the classical artwork collections of the Rijksmuseum, most of the themes are of a biblical nature. It's the same if you go to the Louvre in Paris—you see wonderful landscapes, still-life paintings, and sculptures, but again, most of the themes are biblical.

Christians have made enormous contributions in art, as well as music and literature. Without the Christian church, there would have been no Bach, no Mozart, no Beethoven, no Handel. Christianity has been the cradle of the classical music that has influenced the Western world. Likewise, if you take away the Geneva Bible, there may have been no Shakespeare, no Pilgrims, no Plymouth Colony, no Mayflower Compact. Would there be a United States of America? Who can say?

**What we can say beyond any doubt is that the kingdom of heaven began small but has grown enormously over the past two thousand years.**

It has expanded to every nation on the face of the earth. And it is growing still

## *Hidden but Working*

Matthew then writes: *Another parable He spoke to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened”* (v. 33).

In this brief parable, Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to leaven in the context of baking. The Jews typically took a piece of a loaf of bread and put it into a batch of new dough, and that morsel provided enough fermentation to cause the entire lump of dough to rise. Jesus spoke of a woman performing this baking task, but **notice the word He used:**

He said she **“hid”** the leaven in the dough.

so, *Jesus was saying that the kingdom of heaven was hidden from the sight of most people for the moment, but it was working nonetheless.*

## *Matthew 13:44ff*

**I**n January 1980, we were living in the mountains of Western Pennsylvania. A friend of mine who was a real estate broker told me there were some sixty acres of wooded property nearby that were being sold in a dispute over a divorce at what was basically a fire-sale price of \$200 per acre. He encouraged me to join him in buying those sixty acres, and I did so. A few weeks later, we put a for-sale sign on the property, asking \$400 per acre. Then we waited to see what would happen.

One night, there was a knock at my door, and I opened it to find two strangers in work clothes. It was rather cold outside, so I invited them in. After we exchanged pleasantries, they told me they were inquiring about the property. They explained that they were involved in strip-mining

operations and had traced a great seam of coal all the way from West Virginia, through Pittsburgh, and into the mountains where we lived. They told us they were virtually certain that there were two large seams of coal beneath the surface of the property we were trying to sell. They got down on our living-room rug with their tablets and their papers, and they drew an outline of the property showing the seams of coal that they were sure were down there. They wanted my permission to do a test drill on the property to confirm their expectations, and they explained to me that if they were able to discover these seams, my share of the coal would be \$2 million. I readily gave them permission to dig their test hole.

A few days later, they called and said they were ready for the test dig, and they invited my friend and me to come out and witness it. We had to trudge through two feet of snow to get to the place where they had set up their drilling rig. The machinery was running and dirt was spewing out of the ground as the drill penetrated deeper and deeper. All of a sudden, in the midst of the soil, a black material came spewing out of the ground in abundance. The operator turned off the drill, jumped down, and picked up a handful of this material. Then he put a piece of it in his mouth and bit it. With that, he started to dance around and cry out, "It's coal, we've found the coal." As you can imagine, I was watching all of this and enjoying my new membership in the millionaires' club.

However, my experience as a millionaire lasted only about fifteen minutes. After the men resumed drilling, the drill soon began spewing out dirt instead of coal. The operator got down and looked things over, then he told me: "I'm sorry, but this coal seam is only an inch thick. The seam we've been tracing must have cropped out down below and didn't come up to this property." He thanked me for my willingness to let him make his test drill, then they packed up their gear and left.

My friend and I shrugged off the experience. A few weeks later, we sold the parcel for \$400 per acre. I made a nice profit on the venture, but far short of the \$2 million the coal men had mentioned.

About a month later, I happened to drive back by the property. As I drove by, I noticed that the property was covered with giant earthmoving equipment and huge trucks filled with coal. I told my wife, "We've been had." The coal operator had bought the land in order to possess the coal that was hidden beneath the surface.

## *True Treasure*

I tell this story because it was the only parallel in my life to Jesus' parable of the treasure hidden in a field. Matthew tells us that He said: ***"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field"*** (v. 44). In the ancient world, there were no banks, no safe-deposit boxes, and so on. The normal procedure for hiding and protecting one's valuables was to bury them in some secret place. The law of the land provided that if someone happened to stumble upon buried valuables, he was entitled to that property—unless he was in the employ of the owner of the property. In that situation, the only way he could get his hands on the valuables was to buy the field.

That is the scenario Jesus was referencing in this parable. A man found a treasure hidden in a field, so he sold everything he had to gain the funds to purchase the field and thus possess the treasure.

In the previous chapter, we examined two parables that were about growth. Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed and like leaven.

He was saying that the kingdom was small and hidden at the moment, but it was working, and in time it would grow beyond all expectation.

However...

*the theme of the parable of the hidden treasure is value.*

Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is a treasure that is worth giving up all one has in order to acquire it. All a man has, all of his property, all the wealth he has accumulated in his whole life is worth nothing by comparison to the value of the kingdom.

He then told another parable that made the same point: ***“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it”*** (vv. 45–46).

Here, the subject was a merchant who was in the business of buying and selling pearls. Again, in antiquity, there were no artificial pearls, such as are commonplace in our day, so a pearl was an extremely rare and valuable commodity. We are told that the gates of the New Jerusalem will each be made of a single pearl (Rev. 21:21) because of the extreme value of these particular gems.

The merchant in Jesus' parable searched near and far until he found one exquisite pearl that was so lustrous and magnificent it surpassed all other pearls in value.

*When he found it, he was willing to divest himself of everything else that he owned to possess that one pearl.*

Again...

Jesus' point was that what that man did for a valuable pearl is exactly what a believer should do to gain the kingdom. It is worth far more than all he has.

In the science of economics, there is a theory known as the subjective theory of value. It teaches that value is not inherent but is determined by individuals. In other words, no one can tell another person how valuable a certain thing is, for the two of them will necessarily value the object differently. This is what makes business possible. Any time a merchant prices his shoes more than I value the shoes, I will not buy them. It's that simple. There is no such thing as an objective value for a pair of shoes.

I was reminded of this theory when I was shopping for a car recently. I found a car I liked, I talked to the dealer, and we were about to conclude the sale when we turned our attention to

the trade-in value of the car I already owned. I was not happy with the price he offered me. So, he brought out his little book and said, "This is the objective value of your car." I said, "It may be the objective value of my car *to you*, but it is not the objective value of my car *to me*." I went down the street and found another dealer whose objective value of my car was \$2,000 more than the first fellow's. You see, **value has to do with the degree to which we appreciate and esteem things.**

### **Values Examined**

**I have noticed an increasing confusion in our culture between the terms *ethics* and *values*. Ethics has to do with objective standards as to what is good. But we live in a culture that eschews any objectivity in regard to ethics. We are told that there are no absolutes, no transcendent norms that dictate what is right and wrong. Instead, what is right and wrong is determined by individual preference, that is, by each person's value system. However, ethics and values meet in the mind of God, and our task as Christians throughout the whole course of our sanctification is to adjust our**

value systems to God's value system. When the Bible tells us to seek the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16), that means that we are to esteem the things that He esteems and abhor the things that He abhors. According to these parables, one of the things He esteems most highly is the kingdom of heaven. It is so valuable from God's perspective that people in their right mind do well to sell everything they have in order to possess it.

In light of this teaching of Jesus, **it is clear that we are called to examine our values, to consider that which we esteem most highly. I encourage you to ask yourself these kinds of questions:**

1. "What do I value the most in this world? My wife? My husband? My children? My house? My car? My job? My redemption?" Elsewhere, Jesus posed some serious questions about value:
2. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or

**3. What will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).**

The main characters in the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price were able to gain what they wanted by divesting themselves of all the property they owned at that time. But there is not enough property in this world to pay for a man's soul.

**4. What would you give in exchange for your soul?**

**5. What price would you put on your soul?**

Wherever I go, I like to watch people. I like to wonder what they are thinking about. Sometimes when I look at people scurrying about with so much energy and concentration, I think: “Do they know about the kingdom of heaven? Do they care about it? Or are they so caught up in the pressures, responsibilities, and burdens of their lives that they never step back and ask themselves why they are here, why they are even living?” That's the oldest question the philosophers asked:

“Why am I here?”

But there are millions of people in this world who have no idea about the kingdom of God. It remains as hidden to them as that treasure was before the man discovered it. They have no idea of the valuable thing they are overlooking.