

In Nomine Iesu

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity 2025 The King rules His kingdom by grace – Matthew 13:44-52

“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. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew ashore, and sat down and sorted the good into containers, but threw away the bad. So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Have you understood all these things?’ They said to Him, ‘Yes.’ And He said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.’”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the gracious King of heaven’s kingdom. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

“Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked His disciples on the day He told them many parables. Matthew tells us: “On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. Then He spoke many things to them in parables.” (Matthew 13:1-3) In the verses before today’s text Matthew records four of the parables: The sower and seed, the wheat and tares, the mustard seed, and the leaven. Later that day, after all the crowds had gone away and Jesus once again had gone back into the house, His disciples came to Him and asked Him to tell them the meaning of the parable of the tares, or weeds, left to grow next to the wheat until both are cut down and separated.

Jesus explained it to them this way: “He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Matthew 13:37-43)

I

It is only after He said to the crowds, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear,” that He spoke the three final parables before us tonight to His own disciples. Before asking you the same question Jesus asked His disciples, take a moment and think about the three: the parable of the hidden treasure, of the pearl of great price, and of the net. Turn them over in your mind’s eye, and consider how each illustrates “the kingdom of heaven.” I’ll give you a moment to do that before asking you the same question Jesus asked them that day – “Have you understood all these things?” Jesus’ disciples answered, “Yes.”

I won’t really ask you tonight for an answer. Instead, permit me to read what the notes in a popular Study Bible say: “The parables of vv. 44-52 concern kingdom

values and responsibilities ... In the first story a man stumbles on a treasure trove, which he makes every effort to obtain. The central truth being taught is the immense value of the kingdom, which far outweighs any sacrifice or inconvenience one might encounter on earth ... This second parable on kingdom values was evidently given to further underscore Jesus' optimism for the despondent disciples. His double encouragement indicates their great need at that time. This parable has a slightly different emphasis. Though the first found his treasure by accident, the second found his by diligent search. No matter how a person is led to Christ's kingdom, its values and delights will be beyond estimation." (*Nelson Study Bible*, Nashville, 1997, p. 1599) The last of the three parables, according to the notes of the study Bible, is about the disciples' responsibilities to go out and "catch fish," leaving it to the angels to separate out the good fish from the bad. The study Bible is clearly not Lutheran.

Instead of asking you if you understand, I ask: Do the people who wrote and edited these notes for this Study Bible actually understand "all these things?" Let's see.

In each of the first four parables that Jesus told the crowds that day, the principal character, the active agent, is God. He is the one who sows seed along the path, on the rocks, among the weeds, and, yes, in the good ground also. When Jesus Himself explained the parable of the wheat and tares, He identified the sower of the good seed as Himself. He is obviously also the one who sows the mustard seed and the one who hides leaven in three measures of meal until it is all leavened. Clearly, God is the active agent in all of the four parables Jesus told the crowd by the sea before He told these last three to His disciples. He is the King who rules the kingdom of heaven. The parables explain how He rules, not by force, like the kings of the earth rule. His is not a kingdom where the poor labor and suffer to support the king in luxury. No, quite the opposite. The nature of the Messiah's kingship is otherworldly. It is like nothing we can imagine, which is why many fail to understand the last three parables rightly.

II

Set aside the ideas of the editors of the Study Bible I just read, that is, the the parables speak of "kingdom values and responsibilities." Instead let's assume that Jesus knows what He is teaching, both to the crowds and to His disciples, the last three parables agree with the first four. Let's further assume the word of God is its own best and most reliable interpreter; and it remains faithful to the context it presents. In the first parable the active agent, the one who finds the treasure in the field is God, and He goes and sells all that He has to buy that field in order to possess the treasure in it. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

In the second parable the One who finds the pearl of great price is again God. Having found the pearl, He proceeds to sell all that He has in order to buy it. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

And in the third parable, every kind of fish is gathered into the net and separated by the angels into good and bad. Who else rules over the angels of heaven? Who uses them to guard, protect, and preserve those who are His by faith? Again, God. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

Dear friends, the parables, especially these seven parables of Matthew 13, don't tell us about "kingdom values and responsibilities," whatever that is. If that were the

case, Jesus would be in agreement with the Pharisees. No, the parables, all of them, are about the kingdom of heaven **and its King**. They tell how He rules and why He does what He does. They tell us that the kingdom of God is all about grace. In these parables Jesus is not telling us to be better people, work harder or strive still harder to find our own way into His kingdom. Sadly, man, because of his fallen, sinful nature, his opinion of his own goodness, already imagines he can do that, already pictures the kingdom of God that way. No, Jesus explains to us in the parables something we could never imagine: that God so loved the world, that is, **lying, deceitful, selfish, prideful us**, that He chooses not see us as we really are, but instead in the light of His grace. So, when He looks at us He sees a great and wondrous treasure, buried in the filthy soil of the earth. He sees a pearl of such great price He is willing to give up all that He has, His best, His beloved and only-begotten Son, in exchange for this pearl that is ... **US**. Dear friends, do you understand? Do you understand how glorious, how unfathomably deep the love of God is for you and me, and for all the fallen children of Adam for whom He gave His Son into death?

We are not pearls of great value. Our eyes and ears tell us that cannot be true, but here, dear Lord Jesus Christ, **You tell us otherwise**. You tell us we are of great value in Your eyes. Therefore it must be so. For You are who You say. You do not lie. You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. You came into the world to seek and to save the lost. You are the King of grace. You alone rule in this wondrous kingdom of heaven which You illustrate for us in the parables. So, again I ask you dear friends, Do you understand? Let each of you say: Yes, Lord, I believe. Help Thou my unbelief!

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“Then He said to His disciples, ‘Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.’” This is the only place in the New Testament where the word “scribe” is used in a positive sense. Who were the scribes? They were the ones who copied and preserved the Old Testament. They were the ones who supplied bibles to all the synagogues of God’s people throughout Israel and beyond. Did those scribes understand what they were copying? Did they understand “all these things?” Sadly, many of them did not, as their hatred of God’s chosen Messiah showed. They daily handled and copied truth itself, yet did not understand. But a scribe who is “trained for the kingdom of heaven,” you see, is not like one of that. And so it would be. The men who heard these things from Jesus that day in the house near the sea would write the gospels and epistles of the New Testament. They would become the masters of houses who bring out of their household treasures what is new and what is old.

Thanks be to the King who loved us and gave Himself for us, who walked among us, patiently dealing with our pride and foolishness, who took away our sins. Thanks be to Him who took aside the twelve and taught them to understand all these things and write them down for us so that we too might hear and believe the unbelievable, that “God so **loved** the world that He **gave** His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Thanks be to God for the scribes, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, who from their books bring out for us treasures new and old, truths that have been from the beginning of the world that will stand until its end. I ask you, “Have you understood all these things?” Let all answer, “Yes, Lord.” Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria