

**Introduction:** Acts 17 has a lesson for each of us: Acts 17:10-11, “*The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.*” This is a message for all believers saying that, when preachers and teachers bring us messages, we are to listen carefully, strive to understand, and as part of striving to understand we are to ourselves search the Scriptures to see if what we heard is true.

As I worked on these lessons, I realized that for a few of the parables, the interpretations I had heard all my life, didn’t seem to match what I was reading in Scripture. So far, that was true for the “Mustard Seed,” “Yeast,” “Hidden Treasure,” and “Pearl of Great Value” parables.

The interpretations familiar to me assumed the parable of the “Mustard Seed” and “Yeast” were about the small beginning and rapid growth of the church. It is true that the church began small and has grown large, but examining the context and comparing to related parables all taught by Jesus in one day, that does not seem to be what the two parables are about.

Likewise, familiar interpretations of the “Hidden Treasure” assume the hidden treasure is Christ. We sinners find Christ (the treasure) and give up whatever we must in order to come to Him. In the “Pearl of Great Value,” Christ is assumed to be the pearl which we search for and when we find it give up whatever is necessary to come to Him. Obviously, these statements contain important truth, Christ is a treasure and He is a pearl of great value, but that truth is not what these two parables are about.

In Part 4, I gave what I believe to be the correct interpretation for the “Mustard Seed” and “Yeast” parables. In Part 5, I intend to do the same thing for the “Hidden Treasure” and “Pearl of Great Value” parables.

**Interpreting Parables:** In Part 2, I provided general rules for interpreting parables. Here is a little more detail. The two most critical factors are (1.) a good understanding of the context in which the parable was given, and (2.) a correct understanding of what the symbols used actually represent. When a parable is separated from its context, it can be made to mean most anything. If a wrong meaning is assigned to the symbols used in a parable, it invariably leads to an erroneous

interpretation. That is the problem with the interpretations of the “Hidden Treasure” and the “Pearl of Great Value” that for years seemed right, but now seem incorrect.

**Kingdom of Believers:** To make sure my terminology is clear, when I use the term “kingdom of believers,” I am usually referring to people in the “true universal church of all ages.” The kingdom is invisible to people’s physical senses. Christ is its king. Ultimately all people, believers and unbelievers, will acknowledge the Lordship of Christ, but citizens of the kingdom of believers always acknowledge Christ’s Lordship. Philippians 2:9-11, *“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

**Overview of 8 Parables of Matthew 13:** The 8 parables divide nicely into 3 sections. Section 1 has 4 parables. Section 2 has 2 parables. Section 3 has 2 parables. Parables in each of the first 2 sections can be subdivided into related pairs.

Matthew says all 8 of these parables were spoken by Jesus on the same day. The first 4 were spoken to a crowd, the last 4 only to the disciples (Matthew 13:36). All 8 parables are definitely connected though split between two different audiences. We have already studied the first 4 of these parables.

1. Section 1 concerns Satan’s attempts to destroy the kingdom of believers.
  - **First Pair:** “The Sower” (13:3) says the kingdom of believers must, in presenting the gospel, be prepared to deal with people who have hard, shallow, and crowded, as well as receptive fruitful hearts. “The Tares” (13:24) says the kingdom of believers must be prepared to deal with devious efforts of the wicked one and his agents, especially in the scattering of counterfeit believers among believers.
  - **Second Pair:** “The Mustard Seed” (13:31) says the kingdom of believers must be prepared to spread the gospel when faced with opposition which will begin small but will grow very large. “The Yeast” (13:33) says the kingdom of believers must be prepared to deal with sin that contaminates even the believers themselves.
2. Section 2 concerns Christ’s work on behalf of the kingdom of believers.
  - **Third Pair:** “The Hidden Treasure” (13:44) says individual sinners, who are to be saved, are hidden in the world. They are precious to Christ. He willingly

sacrifices everything to make them His own. The price He pays is a perfect incarnate life and cruel death on the cross. The message of “The Pearl” (13:45) is similar to the “Hidden Treasure,” but the pearl of great price does not represent individuals but the whole church universal through the ages.

3. Section 3 contains 2 parables – The “Dragnet” and the “Householder.” The “Dragnet” concerns final separation of good and bad. “Householder” concerns individuals who study, preach, and teach God’s Word. This parable is often called the “Householder.” In the ESV Bible, it is labeled “New and Old Treasures.”

**“Hidden Treasure”:** Matthew 13:44: *“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.”*

The first issue in interpreting this parable is to determine what the symbols signify. In Jesus’ explanation of the “Sower,” He says He is the sower (13:37) and the field is the world (13:38). Symbols in the “Hidden Treasure” are similar. The man who finds the “Hidden Treasure” is Christ. The field is the world. There is treasure hidden in the world which Christ seeks. Treasure is used metaphorically. To understand what it signifies, consider how “treasure” is used metaphorically in other places in Scripture?

**“Treasure” as a Metaphor in Scripture:** Examples: (1.) Exodus 19:5, *“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine.”* (2.) Malachi 3:16-17, *“Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name. <sup>17</sup> “They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him.”* (3.) 1 Peter 2:9-10, *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*

These passages reveal a progression in the concept of God’s metaphorical “treasure.” Initially, God’s special treasure was Israel. In the Malachi passage, God

refers to His treasured possession as those who fear Him and esteem His name. In 1 Peter, His special people are those of the chosen race, the elect, the Israel of God.

Metaphorically, “treasure refers to the people of God.” As seen in the 1 Peter passage, reference to the people of God can be in terms of their “election” even though they have not yet been converted.

**Hidden in the World:** The hidden treasure, for which Christ is willing to give His, must refer to future believers who have not yet been converted. These future believers of every tribe and tongue are hidden individually in the world. They are converted individually. When converted, though they come as individuals from every nation and are of every tongue, in Christ they become one.

Since the hidden treasure consists of future kingdom people hidden in the world, a reasonable question is how are they hidden? The easiest place to hide people is among similar people. Paul says all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That includes future believers, not yet converted, who are hidden in plain sight in the sinful field of the world. As sinners they merge indistinguishably into the world of sinners, hidden by similarity. They are found and called out of the world. Ephesians 2:1a (NKJV), “*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.*”

**Hidden Again:** Having been made alive in Christ, why does Christ, our finder, hide us again? In fact, why were future believers not clearly identified as such rather than being hidden? The answer to both questions is the same. To protect them. Jesus in John 17 talks about sending believers into the world.

John 17:11, “*I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. <sup>15</sup> I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.*” Christ hides believers by sending them back into the world to be hidden once more in plain sight but with a difference. They are now representatives of Christ and have been given a mission. Believers do not appear much different to the world than they did before they were converted. Their great spiritual change happened in their invisible innermost person. Their daily lives are in many ways much the same as before. Though hidden in the world, they are set apart spiritually by their commitment to God and His truth.

Paul speaks of hiding believers after their conversion. Colossians 3:3, ***“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”*** Believers are God’s treasure whom He hides in Christ.

Christ purchased the field (the world) which contained the hidden treasure by giving His all in payment. He did this with joy. Hebrews 12:1b-2, ***“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”***

The most common interpretation of the “Hidden Treasure” parable is based on Jesus being the hidden treasure. The one who finds the treasure is us. I trust you see that this cannot be so.

**The Parable of the Pearl of Great Value:** Matthew 13:45, ***“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, <sup>46</sup>who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”***

This parable is similar in form and symbols to the Hidden Treasure. Both tell the same basic story, but there is a twist. The pearl of great value represents not individuals but the collective universal church through the ages.

Some believe the pearl of great value is Christ. They believe the merchant is a person who goes seeking Christ and finds Him. A brief look at Scripture raises insurmountable problems. (1.) **Romans 3:11** (NIV), ***“there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.”*** No one seeks God! (2.) John 6:44, ***“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.”*** No one can find Christ unless the Father draws him. (3.) Isaiah 55:1, ***“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; and you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”*** No one can buy anything from God. Thus, we cannot be a merchant who searches for, finds, and buys the pearl of great value. (4.) John 10:3, ***“To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”*** Only Christ can call His own by name. (5.) Isaiah 43:1, ***“But now, this is what the Lord says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”*** The merchant is Christ, our Redeemer, who buys us with the price of His own life. The merchant cannot be a person who seeks Christ, finds Him, hides Him again, and arranges to buy Christ.

Both the “Hidden Treasure” and the “Pearl of Great Value” concern the kingdom of believers. Treasure is a collective noun. The hidden treasure represents individual believers coming together in Christ. If you think of the treasure as being like a chest full of coins, that is the right idea. In the parables of Luke we will come to the parable of the “Lost Coin.” The lost coin represents one lost future believer. A chest full of such coins then represents many future believers who will be called out of the world and converted. The pearl of great value is singular. It represents a whole. The whole is the entirety of the universal kingdom of believers through the ages.

Individual believers are called to be “one body.” Romans 12:5, *“so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”* Ephesians 4:4-6, *“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call — <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”*

**What’s Next:** The parable of the “Dragnet” and the “Householder.”