

Finding and Gathering

Devotional Reading: [Job 28:1-2, 12-19](#)

Background Scripture: [Matthew 13:44-52](#)

Matthew 13:44-52

44 “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.

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.

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. **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.

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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.”

Key Text

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 13:52**

The Righteous Reign of God

Unit 2: Jesus Envisions the Kingdom

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the analogies Jesus used.
2. Compare and contrast those analogies.
3. Identify a proper and improper use of analogies today.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Unexpected Treasure
 - B. Lesson Context: The Two Horizons
 - C. Lesson Context: Parables
 - I. **Selling Everything (Matthew 13:44–46)**
 - A. Parable 1: Hidden Treasure (v. 44)
 - B. Parable 2: Costly Pearl (vv. 45–46)
- Achieving Focus, Finding Gems*

II. Catching and Rejecting (Matthew 13:47–52)

A. Parable 3: Good & Bad Fish (vv. 47–50)

Sorting Rice from Sand

B. Interlude (v. 51)

C. Parable 4: Old & New Treasures (v. 52)

Conclusion

A. Giving Up What You Cannot Keep

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Messiah Meh-*sigh*-uh.

Introduction

A. Unexpected Treasure

On an episode of *Antiques Roadshow*, a man came with a beautiful violin to be appraised by one of the show's experts. It had been in his family for years and had a label inside with the year 1519, supposedly the year it was made. The violin was unusually ornate with extra carvings, inlaid wood, and even an oil painting on the back. Rather than having a carved scroll at the end of the pegbox, it had a detailed carving of a bearded man's head, a rare feature for such an instrument.

The owner seemed confident that such a sixteenth-century instrument would be very valuable. But the appraiser quickly disabused him of this notion. The appraiser judged the violin to have a false date on the

label, the instrument being a glitzy commercial product of a nineteenth-century French shop. But since it was old and of good quality, the appraisal was given to be in the range of \$3,000 to \$4,000—still far below what the owner expected.

But then the episode took an unexpected turn. In the violin case was an accompanying bow of more recent vintage, from the 1940s. The bow looked bad because it needed to be rehaired. The expert identified the bow as having been made by French master craftsman Eugène Sartory. Consequently, the bow was appraised at \$14,000 to \$15,000, about four times what the violin was worth! And this may have been a modest estimate—a Sartory bow sold at auction in 2017 for \$214,000!

The man had a treasure without realizing it. If he had sold the violin in its case and unwittingly included the bow, he might have received much less than he could have. To have discerning eyes and ears is indeed important.

B. Lesson Context: The Two Horizons

A primary challenge we have in applying the New Testament properly to our lives is that of bridging the gap between what is called “the two horizons.” The first horizon is the historical context in which the New Testament was written; the second horizon is the modern context in which the twenty-first-century reader stands. Today’s lesson requires that we grapple with this challenge—and consider what people in the first century AD valued as they accumulated wealth or were unable to do so.

In the ancient world, a person’s wealth was recognized in terms of physically possessing tangible assets such as livestock, precious metals, or luxurious attire (examples: [Genesis 13:2](#); [Joshua 22:8](#); [Job 1:1–3](#); [Luke](#)

15:8; 16:19; James 2:2). A person considered wealthy in the modern day might possess such things as well. But it is just as likely, or even more so, that a person's wealth today would be measured — among other things—in terms of his or her investments in futures or trades in exchange-traded funds involving precious metals. The challenge of valid interpretation of the New Testament is obvious: to best determine proper and valid application, we should first try to see things through the eyes of the original, ancient audience.

The challenge is similar when it comes to preserving wealth. In both the ancient and modern worlds, cattle can be rustled, gold can be stolen, and attire can wear out (examples: Joshua 7:21; Job 1:17; Matthew 6:19; James 5:2). Today, however, we are more likely to think in terms of threats to wealth that come via electronic means: phone calls from dishonest telemarketers, ransomware attacks, and wire fraud from criminal hackers. To protect accumulations of gold and silver in the ancient world involved securing those precious metals on one's person or hiding them somewhere (examples: 2 Kings 7:8; Matthew 25:18, 25). Protecting wealth today is much more likely to involve keeping one's computer antivirus and firewall up-to-date and being cautious about using public Wi-Fi, since modern-day wealth is largely stored in computer memory banks.

C. Lesson Context: Parables

We now move to the third of three lessons on parables of Jesus. In that regard, the Lesson Contexts of lessons 7 and 8 apply here as well.

The parables of Jesus come to us in various forms. Some are developed stories; in these we can identify several that have a beginning (sets a scene), a middle (involves a crisis), and an ending (the crisis is

resolved). The parables considered in [lesson 7 \(Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23\)](#) and [lesson 8 \(13:24–30, 36–43\)](#) fit this category.

But there are also extremely brief parables, which have recently been called a form of flash fiction. A popular example of such fiction is only six words long: “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.” The imagination of the reader is left to fill in the likely tragic details of this story.

Another modern standard is to tell a story in a so-called microblog or a tweet, realizing that Twitter limits the length of tweets to 280 characters (including spaces). As far as today’s lesson goes, the parable of the treasure in the field has (in the *New International Version*) 163 characters (including spaces), the parable of the pearl of great price has 161 characters, the parable of the net has 252 characters (not including its interpretation), and the parable of treasures old and new has 176 characters (all including spaces). These are lengths that would have allowed Matthew to tweet them out if he’d had our technology!

These parables include enough detail to make a point while allowing the reader to imagine other details. Jesus’ parables are usually sparse on details, including only what was necessary to make his point(s). Today’s lesson includes four of these mini narratives that are only found in the Gospel of Matthew. These are descriptions of first-century life in a few words that make a powerful point.

What Do You Think?

How can you use a mini narrative to describe God’s kingdom in a way that a modern audience would find helpful?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take in the coming week to proclaim the message of God’s kingdom?

I. Selling Everything

(Matthew 13:44–46)

A. Parable 1: Hidden Treasure (v. 44)

44. “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.

Visual for [Lessons 6 & 9](#). *Point to this visual and allow the learners one minute to consider how they need to ready themselves for God’s kingdom.*

In this first parable, the burial of a certain *treasure* was not the result

of an exotic pirate adventure, but reflected a situation with which Jesus' original audience would have been familiar. Burying wealth was not the practice of an eccentric miser as it might be today, but was a common practice (see [Lesson Context](#); see also [Proverbs 2:4](#)).

The *field* in the parable is a farming plot, not the site for a house. The Greek word here is *agros*, from which we get our word *agriculture*. Such a field was likely secluded, away from others. This gives the sense that the treasure was uncovered while the man was alone, with no witnesses. This hoard had been forgotten, so only the finder knew its location.

The means of discovery of the treasure is not stated, but it seems to be random. Perhaps it resulted from inspecting the field for possible purchase or from the inadvertent tripping over a large rock. In any case, we are wise to focus on what the parable *does* say, not on what it *does not* say.

Jewish law from this period stipulated that if such treasure was lifted from the ground, it would belong to the current owner of the field. The man apparently covered the treasure, hiding it again, so there was nothing illegal about his actions.

What should he have done? If he were unscrupulous, he might have merely taken the treasure and left, enriching himself with little chance of detection. But that would be stealing. Instead, he decided to purchase the field, thus becoming the rightful owner of the treasure within it.

In Jesus' story, buying this field was not a simple thing for the man. He had no ready supply of sufficient money; he ended up selling *all he had*. He was taking risks. The risks were (1) that he had reckoned that the treasure was worth more than all his personal wealth and (2) that the treasure would still be there after the purchase. In taking these risks, he invested all his earthly possessions in his hopeful expectations regarding

the outcome of this transaction!

The point of the parable is that *the kingdom of heaven* is of superlative, inestimable value. But it requires the commitment of everything for those who would be part of it. This surely resonated with Jesus' disciples. Peter later asserted that they had left everything to follow him ([Matthew 19:27](#)). That is more than figurative language! These men gave up their businesses, their livelihoods, and, eventually, their lives to serve and follow the Lord. When we follow Jesus, the rewards are far greater than what we sacrifice.

What Do You Think?

How can you discern what you need to give up in order to more seriously pursue a flourishing life in God's kingdom?

Digging Deeper

Who will you ask to be an accountability partner regarding this discernment?

B. Parable 2: Costly Pearl (vv. 45–46)

45. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

The second parable's narrative compares *the kingdom of heaven* to the work of a pearl *merchant*. Pearls are unique as gems because living creatures, the lowly oysters, make them. A pearl is formed when a foreign object (such as a shell fragment) is trapped within the oyster's shell. The oyster secretes a substance (mother-of-pearl) to make the sharp fragment smooth and nonirritating.

Pearls are treasured because they are delightful to hold and look at.

They come in various colors, with black pearls being among the rarest. Some historians claim that pearls were seen as the highest treasure in the ancient world, valued above gold, silver, or precious gemstones. The high value of pearls is reflected in their use in the apostle John's vision of the heavenly city (see [Revelation 21:21](#)).

A business that involves trading in such a valuable commodity has the potential for great risk and great reward. This man sought *fine pearls*. We can assume that he was an expert who could quickly and accurately tell the grade of a pearl that might be offered for sale. Oysters were considered unclean for eating, according to the Law of Moses (see [Leviticus 11:9–10](#)), but that doesn't mean that possessing pearls was forbidden.

46. “When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

The man became obsessed as his keen and experienced eye beheld *one pearl of great value*. We should understand this not so much as sticker shock about how much money the pearl's seller wanted but, rather, as the potential buyer's appraisal. It was a pearl unlike any he had ever seen, its value likely due to a combination of spherical perfection, luster, color, and size. His business savvy kicked into high gear. He must have this pearl!

Like the man with the field in the previous parable ([Matthew 13:44](#), above), the merchant *sold everything he had and bought* the pearl. Were he traveling, this would mean, at least, everything he could sell for cash right then—maybe his camel or donkey, his extra clothes, all the pearls or gems he had already purchased, any jewelry on his person, and even his bags or satchels. At most it would mean returning home to liquidate property holdings.

The point of the parable is similar to the previous one: to enter the kingdom of Heaven requires relinquishing our control over everything. Spiritually, we must give up all our ungodly ways and submit fully to the Lord. Materially, nothing we own can be held back if we are fully committed to serve in the kingdom. Everything becomes the Lord's. This involves a shift of mindset from "I own" to "I am a steward." The treasure we receive is worth it!

Achieving Focus, Finding Gems

Visitors to the Crater of Diamonds State Park in Arkansas get to search for rocks, minerals, various gemstones, and real diamonds. The park is one of the few places where people can keep what they find. In May 2021, Christian Liden brought his homemade mining equipment and searched the crater. On the third day, he found a 2.2—carat diamond! He was so excited when he found it that he asked his friend to pick it up for him because his hands were shaking so much.

Mining for diamonds involves, among other things, a single-minded focus that disregards look-alike diamond wannabes. So does our search for the kingdom of Heaven. What would have to happen for you to have that focus?

—L. M. W.

II. Catching and Rejecting (Matthew 13:47–52)

A. Parable 3: Good & Bad Fish (vv. 47–50)

47–48. “Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was

let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 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.

The narrative of the third parable is quite different, as Jesus likens *the kingdom of heaven* to a commercial fishing situation. His hearers were familiar with fishing in the Sea of Galilee, a large, productive, freshwater lake. Commercial fishing was done using a *net* (see [Matthew 4:18](#); [Mark 1:16](#); [Luke 5:2](#))—here a large, open mesh of rope that was woven at regular intervals. It would have both floats and weights suitable for dragging the net between two boats, catching all fish in its area of coverage. The use of such nets results in indiscriminate fishing: they do not differentiate between species of fish that are likely to be near the surface and those that thrive at a depth.

If the net is filled with fish, it would be too heavy to load onto one of the fishing boats. Instead, the bottom of the net would be lifted to trap the fish, and the boats would be sailed or rowed back to *shore*, beaching the haul of fish ([John 21:6–11](#)). There, the fish would be sorted with *good fish* being thrown into large *baskets* used to take them to the market. The *bad* fish would be cast aside, either back into the lake or, perhaps, left on the beach for consumption by scavenger birds or roving dogs.

By one estimate, there are 24 species of fish in the Sea of Galilee today, although it is impossible to know how many there were in the time of Jesus. The Law of Moses stipulated that only fish with fins and scales were considered clean and could be eaten ([Leviticus 11:9–12](#)). This made animals such as eels (no scales), various types of catfish (smooth skin, no scales), and any shellfish (neither scales nor fins) unclean and therefore of no commercial or personal value.

What Do You Think?

How will you cast a wider “net” to evangelize to a variety of people?

Digging Deeper

In what ways can you incorporate your hobbies and interests as a means to meet different people?

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

The reader of the Gospel of Matthew is expected to make connections between this parable and the earlier parable of the wheat and the weeds ([Matthew 13:24–30](#)). Fishermen, somewhat like farmers, were “harvesting” the fish of the lake. Like the earlier parable, the harvest of fish must be sorted, discarding bad fish (like the weeds), and keeping the good fish (like the wheat).

To leave no doubt, Jesus explained the significance of this parable. Ultimately, it is not about fishers, fish, or nets. Rather, it is an allegory about the “harvest” *at the end of the age* ([Matthew 13:40](#)), the time of final judgment. The point of the parable is about the eternal destinies. At the final judgment, the sorting will separate the *wicked from the righteous*. Like sheaves of weeds are burned, the wicked will be consigned to *the blazing furnace*, eternal punishment ([Revelation 21:8](#)). The imagery of *weeping and gnashing of teeth* is one of desiring relief that never comes (compare [Matthew 8:12](#); [13:42](#); [22:13](#); [24:51](#); [25:30](#)).

Sorting Rice from Sand

While a missionary in Ukraine, I sat in the dimly lit home of a woman who had very few worldly possessions. Her two-room hut was on a rutted dirt road in a village on the outskirts of a metropolitan area. She lived with her son and his family, and she spent much of her day cooking on a camping stove and trying to keep their home clean and warm.

As I sat in her kitchen, I watched as she spread a scoop of rice over the kitchen table. She sorted through each grain of rice slowly and painstakingly in order to separate the rice from rocks and grains of sand. I commented on the tedious nature of the task. In my life in the United States, rice does not come mixed with pebbles!

In reply, she shrugged her shoulders and smiled as if to say, “Someone has to do it.” To that idea of sorting we could add—in light of today’s lesson—“and everyone will have it done to them.” Do you live daily with that future reality in mind?

—L. M. W.

B. Interlude (v. 51)

**51. “Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked.
“Yes,” they replied.**

The setting for these parables is still the house where Jesus was speaking privately with the disciples (see [Matthew 13:36](#)). These parables (*all these things*) combine to provide crucial insights into the nature of the kingdom of Heaven. First, it will cost them a great deal: all that they have. Second, the reward they receive by being part of the kingdom of Heaven is far greater than what they give up. Third, there is great warning. What if the man had not given everything to purchase the field and claim the treasure? What if the merchant had not sold everything to

purchase the great pearl? What if their possessions were more important than following Jesus? In that case, they will also lose the greatest reward, that of being counted part of the kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus pushed them by asking, “*Have you understood all these things?*” Implied in this is the deeper question, “Are you ready to give up everything to follow me?” The response *Yes* may reveal more than a hint of bravado (compare [Matthew 20:22](#); [26:35](#)).

What Do You Think?

How can believers show patience when teaching others who may struggle to accept the message of Scripture?

Digging Deeper

How will you incorporate different teaching methods the next time you present that message?

C. Parable 4: Old & New Treasures (v. 52)

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.”

Not all students of the text consider our fourth example to be a parable. But it does teach about *the kingdom of heaven* through use of an analogy.

A teacher of the law was a literate person who made copies of Scripture painstakingly by hand and thus was an expert in the Law of Moses (compare [Ezra 7:6](#); [Matthew 2:4](#); [23:2](#); etc.). For such a person to be depicted as the *owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old*, indicates several things. First, the “new” and “old” in

this context refer to the new treasure of Jesus and the old treasure of the Law of Moses.

Second, since teachers of the law were experts in the old treasure of the Law, they should have eagerly embraced the new treasure of the Messiah when he arrived on the scene (see [Matthew 2:3–6](#); etc.). Instead, Jesus found it necessary to criticize, even condemn, the teachers of the law and their allies, the Pharisees, for their failure in this regard (see numerous examples in [Matthew 23](#)). But not all the teachers opposed Jesus ([Mark 12:28–34](#)). Some were willing to find a new treasure in Jesus’ teachings about the kingdom of Heaven, seeing it as an extension of their old treasure of the Jewish Scriptures.

Third, for a owner to bring treasure out of its hiding place would be to display that treasure for others to see. We can imagine the old valuables to be those the man inherited—family heirlooms, accumulated precious metals and gems, etc. The new treasures would be those he has acquired himself, perhaps jewelry he has purchased or gold coins he has earned through hard work. But this is not about a wealthy householder who wants to show off. Rather, it’s about a willingness to share what the householder has discovered.

What Do You Think?

What “new” treasures regarding the Christian life have been most helpful for maturing your faith in the last year?

Digging Deeper

How will you share these treasures with the less mature believers you interact with?

Conclusion

A. Giving Up What You Cannot Keep

Jim Elliot, a missionary, was killed in Ecuador on January 8, 1956, while attempting to bring the gospel to the indigenous Huaorani people. The death of Elliot and his missionary companions has made him one of the most well-known Christian martyrs of the twentieth century. In 2006, his story came to the silver screen with the release of the movie *End of the Spear*.

Something Elliot wrote in his journal in 1949 epitomized his passion for serving Jesus: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” This speaks to the core point of the parables in today’s lesson. To remain dedicated to the kingdom of Heaven is a treasure far beyond any material possessions. But its cost is a willingness to give up what we have to follow Jesus.

B. Prayer

Father, grant us the wisdom to recognize the priceless nature of your kingdom! And give us the courage to yield all that we have for it. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

The kingdom of Heaven is of ultimate value.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum)

supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Divide learners into pairs and have them discuss the following scenario:

Imagine that your house is on fire. Your family and pets are safe, but you have time to grab one item as you escape. What would you grab, and why?

One of the firefighters has a chance to save one item for you. What would they think was the most valuable item in your house?

Ask volunteers to share their answers for both questions.

Alternative. Distribute copies of “Kingdom Teaching” activity from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually (in a minute or less).

After calling time under either activity, have pairs discuss how easy it can be for people to place value on the wrong things. Transition to the lesson by saying, “Jesus played on people’s inaccurate perceptions of value as he taught them using parables regarding that which has ultimate value.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud [Matthew 13:44–46](#). Ask, “What does it mean to give up *everything* to follow Jesus?” Distribute pens and index cards to learners and ask them to list as many things as possible that they have had to give up to follow Jesus. Remind learners to consider their relationships, material possessions, lifestyle, personality traits, and

future plans. Give them the opportunity to discuss their responses in small groups. (Note: Some learners may prefer to keep their responses private.)

Option. Distribute copies of the “Inventory of Everything” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually (in a minute or less) before discussing conclusions in small groups, but with no pressure to reveal private information.

Upon completion of either activity, allow volunteers to share with the class some of the things that they have chosen to give up to follow Jesus.

Ask another volunteer to read aloud [Matthew 13:47–52](#). Based on information found in the lesson commentary, remind learners how Jesus used analogies and parables to teach others regarding the kingdom of God. Ask, “What analogies might Jesus use today to teach on the kingdom of God?” Distribute index cards with the following prompt (you prepare) to help learners get started:

The kingdom of God is like ...

Encourage learners to complete the prompt, and remind them that there is not a right or wrong answer. (Note: You may need to prepare possible responses before class.)

Into Life

Lead the class in a discussion regarding how believers might use analogies as they share their faith with nonbelievers. Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—What analogies have you heard (or used) regarding aspects of the Christian faith? 2—How do you discern whether an analogy is faithful to what God has revealed in Scrip-

ture? 3—How do you discern that an analogy is appropriate for the audience? 4—What possible drawbacks are there to using analogies in your teaching about Scripture?

Distribute an index card and pen to each learner. Ask them to write a brief parable for the kingdom of Heaven; then have learners share their parables with the whole class. Then have learners write the name of one individual with whom they will share their parable during the upcoming week.

End class with a time of silent prayer. Ask learners to pray for the opportunity and wisdom to share their parables with others. Conclude the time of prayer with praise and thanks for God's heavenly kingdom.