Part Five: The Parable of the Treasure and The Parable of the Pearl
"How shall I describe the kingdom of God?," Jesus

Understanding the Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl
excerpted from “The Kingdom According to Jesus” by Rob Phillips

I’m using Rob Phillips’ review of the parables this week to offer a different structure to understanding parables. Phillips is a conservative writer. I think you’ll enjoy his insights.

The Hidden Treasure

Central theme

The central theme of this parable is that the kingdom of heaven is of immense value. Even though the kingdom has come in humble form – largely escaping the notice of secular historians – it is like a treasure whose value transcends every other possession.

Notice how Jesus builds His case for the kingdom: The kingdom has come, but not in the way the Jewish leaders expected. It is here, but can be resisted (parable of the sower). Its citizens will coexist with unbelievers until Messiah returns (parable of the wheat and tares). It begins humbly, almost imperceptibly, yet it is the kingdom of God (parables of the mustard seed and leaven). It should not be underestimated; the kingdom is of immense value (parables of the hidden treasure and pearl of great price).

Central character

The treasure is the focus of this parable. In Jesus’ day, it was not uncommon to bury valuables in the ground to keep them from unscrupulous neighbors, thieves or marauders. This often was done by men before departing for battle or embarking on long journeys. If they returned safely, they could reclaim their buried treasure. But if they died in battle or failed to return home for any reason, the location of the valuables would remain a secret. Because of this, some people in the Holy Land lived as treasure hunters. The Bible features numerous references to the pursuit of hidden treasure (see, for example, Job 3:20-21; Prov. 2:3-5). Even so, the hidden treasure belonged to the person who owned the property, so the one who discovered the treasure would have to purchase the land to become its rightful owner, or be considered a thief.
It is possible, however, that the treasure to which Jesus refers is an underground mine of gold or silver, whose entrance is discovered by accident. Unlike a pot of money, which easily (although illegally) could be carried away, the mine would require excavation and, no doubt, draw considerable attention. So the discoverer “reburies,” or hides again, the entrance to the mine, sells all he has and buys the field. His actions are questionable, if not unethical; Jesus does not condone this unscrupulous man’s tactics any more than He approves of the actions of the unjust steward in Luke 16:1-8. The point is that the man who discovers the treasure finds it to be more valuable than all he owns, and he strikes out with great urgency to make the treasure his.

Details
We should be careful not to read too much into this parable. Some, for example, say the treasure is the church, the field is the world and the man is Christ. By this interpretation, Christ in His foreknowledge saw such value in the church that He sold all He had – He gave up His heavenly glory and came to earth – for our salvation, and in the process bought the world. But this is not consistent with Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom or with the purpose of His parables. Others argue that the gold or silver mine is the kingdom and Christ is the entrance; indeed, Jesus declared Himself to be “the door” (John 10:9) and “the way” (John 14:6), and He urges us to enter the kingdom through “the narrow gate” (Matt. 7:13). The field is the world and the man is anyone God has drawn to Himself. While this explanation seems more in line with Christ’s teaching about the kingdom, it still may force more meaning than Jesus intended.

Jesus’ parables are realistic stories that communicate a single truth; the details are just “window dressing.” The simple meaning of this parable is that the kingdom of heaven is of more value than anything we possess, and it is worth all we have.

Spiritual application
Entrance into the kingdom is worth everything we have; nothing is more precious.
The Pearl of Great Price

**Central theme**
The central theme of this parable is the same as the theme of the hidden treasure: The kingdom of heaven is a treasure whose value transcends every other possession.

**Central character**
The priceless pearl is this parable’s main character. Even though Jesus says the kingdom may be likened unto a merchant in search of fine pearls, it is the great value of the kingdom that He has chosen to emphasize. Pearls are precious stones, found in the shells of oysters. Their beauty, size and rarity make them valuable. In John’s vision of heaven, one extraordinarily large pearl makes up each of the 12 gates of New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:21), and only the citizens of the kingdom are welcome inside. Such pearls are unfathomable on earth but serve to illustrate the immeasurable value of the kingdom of heaven.

**Details**
The merchant is experienced and recognizes the rarest of pearls when he comes upon it. Matthew Henry comments: “All the children of men are busy, seeking goodly pearls: one would be rich, another would be honourable, another would be learned; but the most are imposed upon, and take up with counterfeits for pearls…. Jesus Christ is a Pearl of great price, a Jewel of inestimable value, which will make those who have it rich, truly rich, rich toward God; in having him, we have enough to make us happy here and for ever.”

George Eldon Ladd adds context to both the parable of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price: “The Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure whose value transcends every other possession; it is like a pearl whose acquisition merits the loss of all other goods. Now again, the idea that the man buys the field or that the merchant buys the pearl has nothing to do with the basic truth of the parable. This parable does not tell us that we can buy salvation. Salvation is by faith, the free gift of God; and Matt. 20:1-16 teaches that the Kingdom is a gift and not a reward which can be earned. Yet even though the Kingdom is a gracious gift, it is also costly. It may cost one his earthly possessions (Mark 10:21), or his friends or the affections of his family or even his very life (Luke 14:26).
But cost what it may, the Kingdom of God is like a treasure or a costly pearl whose possession merits any cost” (The Gospel of the Kingdom, p. 62).

**Spiritual application**
People should see the immense value in the kingdom of heaven and willingly give up anything that keeps them from becoming its citizens.

*Read Matthew 6:19-21.* How does this relate to the parables you’ve of which you’ve just read?
Reflection Questions:

Read Matthew 13:44-46

Treasure Hid in a Field

- Have you ever found any treasure? What was it?

- Explain this parable about the kingdom of heaven.

- What does the hidden treasure represent?

- Would it be honest to find something in a field and then go buy the land?

- Why or why not?

- What do you treasure in your life right now?

- What is it costing you?
Merchant Seeking Goodly Pearls

- Explain this parable about the kingdom of heaven.

- What would be a pearl for which it was worth selling all you had?

- What is Jesus asking us to do?

- What should we cherish? Why?

- How does this relate with where your thinking is now?

- What is it that holds a greater value in your life than the Kingdom of Heaven? Why?

- Does giving up everything mean that we stop having a good life, fun, or nice things? Explain your answer.
It has been said that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. The Lord Jesus frequently used parables as a means of illustrating profound, divine truths. Stories such as these are easily remembered, the characters bold, and the symbolism rich in meaning. Yet, there was something much more behind the parables of Matthew 13...the secrets to the Kingdom of Heaven were being revealed. As Jesus said, “He who has ears, let him hear.” The Kingdom awaits!