

Matthew 13:44-58

The Kingdom of heaven

Introduction. Matthew records three short parables, each of which starts with the phrase 'the kingdom of heaven is like...'. This expression is used 32 times in his Gospel along with the phrase 'the kingdom of God' and 'the kingdom' (each 5 times). The kingdom of heaven is presented as a present reality and also simultaneously a future reality. The 'kingdom of heaven' refers to God's rule and His sovereignty.

V. 44. Jesus is not giving a commentary on the legality or the morality of the actions of the man who finds the treasure. The focus is on the enormous value of the 'kingdom of heaven'. To be under God's rule is the most important reality and all else is of no lasting value.

Vv. 45-46. This parable is similar to the finding of the treasure except that the merchant is looking for the valuable pearls. He finds one outstandingly valuable pearl and sells all to buy the pearl.

Vv.47-50. The parable of the net shifts the focus to the reality of wicked and righteous people and has close parallels with Jesus' explanation of the parable of the 'weeds' (Vv. 40-43). The fishermen cast their net and haul in good (edible) fish and bad (inedible or prohibited) fish which they separate. The theme of 'fire' as a means of God's judgment can be seen as the action of destroying (see Is. 33:14 but also as 'eternal fire' Mt. 25:41; Jude 1:7). The '**wicked**' are those who reject God's love and forgiveness and fail to repent and trust in Him. The '**righteous**' are those who recognise their own sinfulness and through repentance throw themselves on God's mercy, then receive the forgiveness Christ has won and His righteousness. A future reality shown through a parable.

V. 51. Jesus asks if they understand his teaching and their quick 'yes' is not fully borne out by their subsequent actions (Mt. 14:22ff; 15;16ff).

Vv. 52. The true teacher of the law ('scribe', but not like the many who rejected Jesus) is one who has become a disciple of Jesus. Again, Jesus uses a parable of a householder who possess both new and old treasures. Jesus affirms both the old treasures (OT) and the new treasures (his teaching). The old prepares the way for the new and is only fully understood in the light of the new. Jesus reveals God's plan of salvation which has been hidden since the foundation of the world (v.35; Ps. 78). Jesus' disciples are challenged to live and teach what he has taught them.

Vv. 53-57. Jesus is rejected in his hometown, Nazareth. They were amazed but offended by his wisdom and power to perform miracles. Jesus chose not to perform many miracles citing their lack of faith. Faith and miracles (8:10, 13; 9:2, 22, 28-29; lack of faith Lk. 7:11-17; Jn 5:1-15).

Reflection/Response. How would people see that we value being under God's rule? How do we respond to Jesus' challenge as his disciples to make him known to others? What aspects of God's kingdom (rule) can we celebrate now and what aspects are we looking forward to being realised in the future? How do we warn people of the eternal consequences of rejecting God?