

(See 13: 11-16, 19 & 23 and recall what it means to “understand” in this chapter.)

*Jesus is seeking to show the disciples their privileged position. They understand him and yet they live in a world of people who don't understand Jesus. He is seeking to show them that God has had mercy on them and enabled them to see and hear and understand who Jesus is and to act in accordance with that understanding. In other words he is helping them to see that they are the man who found the treasure and the merchant who found the pearl because they are his followers. Yet he is seeking to remind them of what he said in v. 11, they “know” because God has given that knowledge to them. They are not smarter than other sinners, they have been graciously given faith.*

Verse 51 begins with “For this reason”. What reason is Jesus referring to? Why does he give this next parable?

*Jesus tells them this next parable because they do understand. They have sold all they possess in order to have Christ and so he tells them this brief parable. God has been gracious to them and so he wants them to understand one more thing.*

Note that v. 52 is a metaphor. A real person, “a teacher of the law who was made a disciple in the kingdom of heaven” (my literal translation) is compared to a wealthy homeowner who shares his wealth, both the old and the new wealth with others.

What do we know from the gospel of Matthew about “teachers of the law”?

- 5: 20 *They aren't part of the kingdom of heaven*
- 12:38-39 *Jesus accuses them of being wicked because of their demand that he perform a “sign” to prove who he is.*
- 15:1-2 & 7-9 *They have rejected God's commands and have made up their own laws. They are hypocrites who say they love God but have no true affection for God.*
- 16:21 *They are the ones who killed Jesus*
- 23: 1-36 *Jesus describes them with the harshest kind of language. He calls them hypocrites, a brood of vipers, blind guides, etc. He declares that God's wrath is going to be poured out upon them.*

While every description of the teachers of the law in Matthew is negative, what does Jesus presume is going to happen to some of them?

*He expects that some of these wicked hypocritical men who cannot enter the kingdom of heaven because of their unrighteousness are going to be made disciples of the kingdom of heaven. In other words, at least some of these hard-hearted people are going to receive the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven just like the disciples. God is going to “grant some of them faith in Jesus” (Phil. 1: 29).*

Why does he bring this up at this point?

*He is using teacher's of the law to stand for the conversion of every kind of sinner. He picks out the worst sinner he can think of to show that God's grace can save anyone and then he uses them to illustrate something that is true for every Christian. If this is what is true for converted teachers of the law, then it must be true for every other Christian as well.*

What does the metaphor teach us about being a Christian?

- 1) *Christians are wealthy because they have found the treasure, Jesus. See Col. 1: 27.*
- 2) *Christians gladly share the wealth. This not only means they share the gospel but that they live generous lives. They delight to give to others because they are so rich in Christ.*
- 3) *Ask, what are the new treasures and the old treasures that we share? The new and old treasures refer to the fact that there are many ways of living that Christians and non-Christians both affirm as wise and virtuous. There are many things I believed were right and wrong before I was a Christian that I still believe are right and wrong. These are the old things. However, the reasons for doing what I do and not doing what I don't do are vastly different. And there are many things that I now believe are wrong that I never saw as wrong and many things that I now see as my duty that I didn't see as my duty before. These are the new things.*

Are you a generous person because you are so aware of the wealth you have in Jesus?

**Christians live lives of chosen, joyful self-denial because they gladly share the treasure they have been given.**

*The parable of the weeds is much longer and Jesus explains far more of the details than in the parable of the net and fish. But both parables are making the same basic point. Christians and non-Christians live together in God's world, enjoying all the benefits of it. However, there is a day coming when God will put an end to this way of existence and will judge all human beings. He will send his angels to save all the righteous and to punish all the wicked in hell forever.*

Why does Jesus tell this parable to the disciples when he just finished saying essentially the same thing just moments before this? What is the relationship between this parable and the parable of the treasure and the pearl? There are at least three points Jesus is trying to make:

1. Who is doing the acting in the parables of the treasure and the pearl? Who is acting in the parable of the net? What's the point?

*In the parables of the treasure and pearl Christians are doing the acting. We are the ones who treasure Christ and "decide" that our life is not as valuable as possessing Christ. In the parable of the net, God is the one who is acting. He is the one who is deciding which fish are valuable and which are not. Jesus reminds the disciples and us that this is God's world and he is bringing the whole thing to an appointed end according to his timetable. We aren't in control, he is. One of the chief reasons that fellowship with Jesus is the greatest of all joys is because he is the one in control of the destiny of the world. To know Christ is to know the one who is in charge of all things.*

2. When Christians deny themselves do they always, immediately experience the joy of knowing Jesus? Do Christians ever go through long periods where there seems to be no benefit to being a Christian? How does the third parable relate to the first two in light of this reality?

*Christians do not always experience the joy of knowing Christ when they obey him. In fact, there are many times when Christians will go through long periods when there appears to be no benefit to being a Christian. Therefore, Jesus wants us to know that even if we do not*

*experience any joy now, the joy that is awaiting us will more than make up for the suffering here. Jesus gives this third parable to remind us that the full experience of Jesus as a treasure chest of holy joy will not take place until we are with him in heaven. Therefore we should persevere in faith and hope even when there is no joy, no immediate benefit to obeying him because there is a day of salvation and condemnation coming.*

3. What criteria will God use to determine who are the good "fish" and who are the "bad" fish? Who are the righteous and who are the wicked?

*Those who have sold all they have in order to obtain the kingdom of heaven are the good fish and those who find this life to be more valuable than Christ are the bad fish. Jesus is issuing a warning to his disciples that there must be evidence of a preference for him in the life if God is going to reward the individual with heaven. God treasures those who treasure him. This is the infallible evidence that you are a Christian. Just like the person who wears blaze orange, gets up at 4 am and sits quietly in the woods, in the snow for 4 hours with his gun cradled in his lap is for sure a deer hunter. You know that here is a person who believes in the goodness of deer hunting, who finds pleasure in it, who believes in it. In the same way the person who trusts Christ, who is hoping in Christ as his only Savior continually denies himself or herself for the sake of knowing Christ more and enjoying heaven. It's not a question of earning God's favor but of living in a manner that corresponds to what you believe and love. A true deer hunter cannot be happy sitting next to the fire and reading a book while the season is on. A Christian cannot be happy demanding his own way, living in open sin and rebellion while he knows that God treasures those who treasure him. He loves God and yearns to be near God and to be like God and so he denies himself in order to have what he loves.*

**Christians live lives of chosen, joyful self-denial because God treasures them.**

Why does Jesus ask his disciples if they understand what he has said in chapter 13? What is significant about the fact that they answer yes?

Describe some ways this works practically in a Christian's life. For example, why does a Christian read the Bible and not watch TV? Why does a Christian go to church and not sleep in? Why does a Christian husband or wife forgive their spouse? Why does a Christian single man not engage in sexual relations? Why do Christian parents discipline their children?

*The reason a Christian reads the Bible instead of watching TV is because they believe to know Jesus is more pleasurable than watching TV. The reason Christians go to church is because they are convinced that loving and worshipping God is more beneficial than sleeping in on Sunday morning. The reason a Christian husband forgives his wife and seeks to love her in spite of her unwillingness to apologize is because he knows that by doing this he will join with Christ in his sufferings. The reason the Christian parent persists in loving and disciplining her children when they ignore her is because she wants above all things to know Jesus better. The reason the single Christian man does not have sex is because he yearns to love Jesus more. He cannot bear the thought of displeasing Jesus because Jesus is more attractive to him than sex. The reason the Christian worker doesn't participate in the daily criticism of the boss is because he wants to see God. Christians abandon their right to have a satisfying job, a good marriage, a satisfying sexual life, a fat retirement account, the approval of their family because they want something more than any of those things. They want to know the joy of fellowship with Jesus.*

How is it that these two stories are not teaching that a person "buys" their way into heaven? How is it that "selling all you have to buy the field/pearl" is not teaching salvation that is based upon your works? Another way to ask it is this: what do these two stories tell us about what faith is and what it is not?

*These two stories show us that when a person believes in Jesus they are not simply giving intellectual assent to some facts about Jesus or assenting to the fact they cannot earn their way into heaven. But rather, "Saving faith is the confidence that if you sell all you have, and forsake all sinful pleasures, the hidden treasure of holy joy (i.e. Jesus) will satisfy your deepest desires. Saving faith is the heartfelt conviction not only that Christ is reliable but also that Christ is desirable. It is the confidence that he will come through with his promises and that what he*

*promises is more to be desired than all the world." The acts of obedience and the "sacrifices" we make are not an attempt to obligate God to be nice to us. Rather they are the only logical thing a person who believes that Jesus is the greatest of all beings will do in order to know and please him.*

What do the differences between the two stories add to our knowledge of how God works in our lives?

*We see that sometimes, God, without our even looking, surprises us with discoveries of the greatness of his mercy in Christ. We suddenly are impressed with the surpassing value of knowing Christ and we abandon lesser pleasures with ease in order to enjoy Christ more. Other times we spend a long time seeking Christ, pleading with God for tastes of Christ and looking for the joy that is promised and then, only after seeking, God reveals Christ to us. We struggle with obedience and with forsaking sin for a long time but then we discover the greatness of Christ and quickly abandon our sin, our demands for life to go our way and are happy to simply belong to Christ.*

What do these two stories tell us about how to overcome sin in our lives?

*We overcome sin by discovering that Jesus is a better reward than pleasures of sin. We overcome sin by replacing the pleasure of sin with a greater pleasure, the knowledge of Jesus.*

Can you see ways in which your delight in the greatness of Jesus is enabling you to "sell your possessions" in order to have Jesus more?

**Christians live lives of chosen, joyful self-denial because they treasure Christ above all.**

Note that the three parables in vv. 44-50 are linked together by the word, "Again", at the beginning of the second and the third parable. They must be interpreted together.

Compare the parable and explanation of the parable in vv. 47-50 with the parable and explanation in vv. 24-30 and 36-43. How are they similar and how are they different?

# THE RULE OF GOD IS HEAVEN

## Matthew 13: 44-52

*Review this week's catechism question.*

### INTRODUCTION

Take a minute and think about something that you enjoy doing on a regular basis (Hobby, sport, work, entertainment, etc.). What are the “costs” associated with your doing this particular activity? What do you have to say “no” to in order to do this? Are there monetary costs or physical energy costs? Are there relational costs? Why do you keep doing this activity in spite of these costs?

*Everything that I do has costs associated with it, even if it is only that I cannot do something else while I'm doing the thing I enjoy. The only reason I keep doing a particular thing in spite of the costs associated with it is because I believe it will give me more pleasure than not doing it. Everyone does what they do because they believe it will make them happy.*

The Bible is quite clear that if you plan on going to heaven, if you are going to be a Christian there is a cost. A few of the hundreds of costs can be seen in these verses. What are the costs in these verses?

- Luke 9: 23-24
- Matthew 6: 19
- Matthew 10:22
- 1 Peter 2: 18-21
- 1 Peter 3: 9
- Eph. 5: 18
- Romans 15:2
- Phil. 4: 4

The Christian life is a life that is full of self-denial, self-restraint and self-sacrifice. Why would anyone choose to live the life that is described in the Scriptures? Why would anyone continue to live this life when there are so many easier ways to live? These are the questions that Jesus addresses in the four parables we find in Matthew 13: 44-52. These parables are spoken to his disciples, not the crowds of people. He

is seeking to give them the motive for living the life of self-denial that is required of all Christians.

### STUDY

To whom is Jesus speaking in vv. 44-52? (see vv. 36 and 51)

*Jesus is speaking to his disciples, not the crowds.*

There are two parables in vv. 44-46. How are they the same and how are they different?

*They are the same in that in both stories a person finds something of great value. He then gladly sells all his possessions in order to buy the object of value that he has found. They are different in that the man in the first story is not looking for treasure but simply happens upon it. The merchant in the second story is actively looking for valuable pearls. Additionally, the merchant pays full price for the pearl whereas the man who found the treasure is obtaining far more wealth than he is giving up to get the treasure.*

Who do the man and the merchant represent?

*They represent Christians. They are an example of what it means to have faith in Christ. Jesus is describing the chief characteristic of those who have become his followers.*

What does the treasure and the pearl represent?

*The treasure and the pearl represent Jesus and his kingdom.*

What do these two stories tell us about why Christians live lives of self-restraint, self-denial and self-sacrifice?

*The key point of the two stories is that the reason Christians restrain themselves and obey God is because of the joy of possessing Christ. Christians joyfully deny themselves the pleasures of this world in order to gain a greater treasure, the treasure of knowing, loving, trusting and obeying Jesus.*