

26 July 2026 Matthew 13:31-33 and 44-52

More parables: the Kingdom of God: a mustard seed, hidden treasure, a beautiful pearl and a fiery furnace.

Jesus has a vital message for us. It explains how inconceivably, extraordinarily, supernaturally wonderful his Kingdom is, and just how terrible the outcome will be for those who ignore him.

In Matthew 13: 16-17 he explains to his disciples, 'blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. ¹⁷ For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.' In these four parables, he assesses the crowd, and matches the words to the listeners.

People flocked to hear him, so many people that he took refuge in a boat. He may have been at the 'Cove of the Sower', halfway between Capernaum and Tabgha. It's shaped like a natural amphitheatre, so even people standing at the top of the ridge would have heard him clearly.

There were hordes of people, all sorts of people. Rich people, like the young man who went sadly away when he was told that he should sell everything he had. Inland revenue officers, collaborators, military men, (think of the soldier whose faith was so strong that he knew that Jesus only had to say the word and his daughter would be healed), agricultural workers and fishermen, poor people, criminals, the sick and disabled, sex workers and people who were sleeping rough. More besides, officials from the temple, both open-minded, like Nicodemus, and others looking for ways of discrediting this disruptive influencer.

How does Jesus approach this disparate group? Few would be literate. Life experiences and understanding would be vastly different.... Stories, of course. Everyone loves a story. And Jesus chooses a story for each and every person there, and for us, here, today. Stories which explain and advise, stories which intrigue, stories which warn of terrible outcomes. An assortment of stories which have intense meaning for particular individuals, which go straight to their hearts, and to ours.

Agricultural workers would prick up their ears at the story of the mustard seed, not without a wry smile: mustard seeds are prolific, and the plant can take over a field in no time! What's more, you don't always get a tree which shelters the birds of the air (charming image!) mostly the plants are a bit like ragwort... nevertheless, a vivid and convincing message.

Is there anyone here who makes bread? Of course, you know exactly what the yeast does, but look at the quantities! This woman is starting with 27 kilos of flour! That will give her 46.58 kg of dough, which I think would give you 62 loaves. Some kneading required there! But like the mustard plant, a meaningful tale of exponential growth.

The thought of finding treasure is so attractive! As I child, I was enchanted by the idea of the crock of gold at the end of the rainbow! It seemed to be so easy to reach ... but the rainbow kept moving away! Do *you* happen to have a metal detector tucked away somewhere? Or would you have liked to join Howard Carter in 1922 as he discovered Tutankhamun's tomb?

Isaiah says that the kingdom of God is like hidden treasure (chapter 45) and that we are called personally, individually, by name.

'I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.'

Jesus is becoming more serious. He is addressing the people who have property, maybe some savings. This man sells everything to buy that field. He gives up everything he's got to get the treasure.

This is a massive decision. He turns away from everything he has amassed in his life in order to have these riches. I don't grow vegetables or make bread, but this story certainly speaks to me.

Do you love beautiful things? Do you have a favourite painting, ornament, or piece of jewellery? I have my mother's pearl earrings. They are lovely and remind me of her. I do enjoy wearing them. Another parable in which a man gives up everything to have the most precious thing he has ever seen. It seems that God appreciates beauty too: In Revelation 21:21, John describes the New Jerusalem:

"The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass."

Jesus' last story in this series speaks clearly to the fishermen. Sorting the catch would be an everyday event for them. Who would think of *themselves* as fish, though, to be sorted and perhaps rejected?

Of course there will be a sorting hat, and it will be nasty for the baddies: Noah and his family are saved from the flood, whilst everyone else perishes. In Psalm 1, we hear that the righteous are "like a tree planted by streams of water" (Psalm 1:3), while the wicked are "like chaff that the wind blows away" (Psalm 1:4).

However, this parable comes close. Do we have to be good people to be chosen? Will our good deeds be counted and weighed against bad thoughts and worse actions? What can we *do* to be 'thrown in the basket' and to save ourselves from the flames and the wailing and gnashing of teeth? Last week, Jane suggested that perhaps people are not all good or all bad. I'd like to go further: I mentioned the vast range of society listening to Jesus. Now think of all the varied individuals reading the Bible at this very moment all over the world. You recall the robber on the day of Jesus' crucifixion? Had *he* led a good life? And yet, in Luke 23 he pleads,

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." The reply?

"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

This series of parables, moving from straightforward, light and even humorous, to serious messages and deadly warnings, draws us all in. God's advice is for every one of us. Leave everything behind and grasp his treasure, dispose of all our hang ups, all our baggage, and so attain the trees full of birds, the plentiful bread, the glorious pearl, the fantastic treasure, he offers us. Jesus already has a deep understanding of who we are and where we're up to, and he's ready to talk with us in whatever way is meaningful for us. All we need is a trusting faith, and a simple, humble entreaty to be remembered when he comes into his kingdom. Jesus is waiting.

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