

1 Kings 3:5-12

At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?"

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you.

Matthew 13:44-52

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

"Have you understood all these things?" They said to him, "Yes." And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

Sermon

After finding one pearl of great value...

The general thinking may be that parables are simple stories, but there is always more than what meets the eye.

A hidden treasure is found. The Kingdom of heaven is found, for it says,

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. (Matthew 13:44)

It is directly followed by the parable of the pearl.

In Jesus' time there were no safes with codes. Jewellery, money, treasures were kept safe by burying them in the ground. There is a story of a man called Abba

Judan who was ploughing his field. Suddenly his cow sinks into the ground and breaks her leg. Abba Judan gets down to help his cow and then this happens: God lights up Abba Judan's eyes, after which the man sees...finds a treasure¹.

In Jesus' parable someone finds a treasure. He does not take it home with him. No, he covers it up again and so the treasure remains part of the field. He goes home and sells all he has and then buys the field. The whole field with the treasure is his.

But it is not about a good purchase.

In this parable it is about the profound joy about what is found and the actions of the person who finds it. Jesus hopes that it is the nature of the response to finding the treasure, that registers with us.

Then it flows over into the parable of the pearl where it says,

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls....(Matthew 13:45)

This merchant finds a pearl that is incomparable with any other pearl.

It is the recognition; the discernment of the true value of what is found and how radically it brings about change: the merchant's life that was defined by doing trade ends, as he chooses to give up his trade for what he has found. From that moment onwards, he needs nothing else. His life is now defined by the treasure, which symbolically stands for the Kingdom of heaven.

Does the Kingdom of heaven as it is present in and through the Word and the work of Jesus Christ, have the same effect on us, as the treasure and pearl have on their finders?

In our Old Testament reading, God appears to King Solomon and asks him

"Ask what I shall give you".(1 Kings 3:5)

How does Solomon respond to this question from God?

Solomon responds with humility; with a deep awareness of what God had done for his father, King David. The throne Solomon was given was first his father's throne. He speaks with respect about his father. He speaks with reverence to God who was always with his father David. From within this humble presence before God, the young King Solomon thinks first in terms of the God-given task he has been given, when he says,

You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom

¹ Het Evangelie naar Mattheus II, by Dr J.T Nielsen

*you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude
(1 Kings 3:6-8)*

A young king is facing an enormous task. This task is what defines him. The responsibility is what is on his mind and in his heart. He answers God from that perspective, when he asks God this,

Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil (1 Kings 3:9)

The original text says, "Give your servant a *hearing heart*..." That is what Solomon asks from His Lord.

Solomon does not think in terms of the honour, the richness, the privileges that kingship gives him. It would be a natural thing if he had done that. Solomon does not ask for any of them. Solomon asks for a hearing heart instead; for that gift that is consistent with what Jesus says after telling the parable of the sower,

*As for what was sown on good soil, this is **the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.**" (Matthew 13: 23)*

In the third parable the kingdom of heaven is compared with a net full of fish. Again, the emphasis is not on the net, but on what the fishermen do. They do what will be done at the close of the age: they separate the good and bad. Not until then, will that separation happen.

The parable has also a sting that we wish was not there,

*The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
(Matthew 13: 4)*

But...would it not give some reassurance that those who do evil to others are accountable to God?

Also, Jesus says, no separation of the good and evil until the Judge of all judges will do that Himself. That means there is time to turn to Him; to repent. For the God from whom Jesus comes is the Lord who passed before Moses,

*The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin"
(Exodus 34:6,7)*

Finally, Jesus asks His disciples if they understand. They do. They do understand the meaning of, "*bringing out of his treasure what is new and old.*" They know that old and new do not form a contrast.

The old is the Torah, the words that God gave to Moses; the commandments. The new is Jesus' interpretation of the words of the law and the words of the prophets. Both are needed. They belong to each other. They are intertwined. Jesus'

interpretation is new and as such it defines the Kingdom that has been realised in Him. As he says,

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.” (Matthew 5:17)

With the parables Jesus encourages the hearers to respond to Him, in whom we find the Kingdom of heaven, as the man and merchant respond to the treasure and pearl.

Amen