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THE WOODS

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The Great Parable Series

FOUR PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

GEMS ON A COMMON THEME

THE LEAVEN Matt. 13:33

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

THE HIDDEN TREASURE Matt. 13:44

THE MUSTARD SEED Matt. 13:31-32

THE PEARL Matt. 13:45-46

YOU ARE THE CENTRAL FIGURE

BELLOVED CENTURION:

There is much that could be said about this lesson which you have in your hand at this moment; however, your instructor feels that it is best to let the truths set forth speak for themselves.

We call the Parables which are used "gems", because of the brilliance of the light that shines forth from them. Have you ever thought that it is not really a diamond that shines; it is the light which causes it to send forth its lustrous beams. The gem itself would have no brilliancy without the light. So it is with the electric lights in our home; in speaking of lights we so often say "Turn on the light", or "Turn off the light", but we cannot turn on a light, - it is a mechanism that makes the light shine.

And so it is in our own lives, the light must come from within. We must cause that light to glow.

How beautiful gems are, which is probably the reason they are used as spiritual emblems in REVELATIONS. Also, you will remember when you took your last initiation, gems played a very important part in the structure. They look like fragments of Heaven; an explanation of the Kingdom of Heaven is given you in this lesson. Nearly everyone knows in a rather vague sort of way what is meant by the Kingdom of Heaven, but if they were asked for a real definition they would find it difficult to put into words.

You, as an advanced member of The Mayans, are striving to find the Kingdom of Heaven. Some are very close; but some find it for a period of six months, more or less, and then let it slip away, only to find it again - sometimes to hold, and sometimes to permit it to drift away again.

It is my sincere desire that you make up your mind to get the utmost from this lesson. You can not read it without advancing. There is only one way of life, and that comes to you when you enter the Kingdom. THERE IS NO OTHER WAY. This, Beloved Centurion, is the deepest conviction of your instructor. I KNOW it to be true, and if I can impart to you what I have learned and know to be truth, my heart will be filled with gratitude for the privilege of having been the instrument that has gained you an entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven.

I will be with you telepathically as you study this lesson; I will be watching you mentally and noting your reaction, and hoping that you will be greatly enlightened.

We proceed now along the Path that leads to the Kingdom:

FOUR PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM. Matthew 13.

GEMS ON A COMMON THEME

THE thirteenth chapter of Matthew is a chapter of parables. Aside from the longer ones there are three very short ones with which this lesson will deal. Each is as great as it is brief, and they are set like pearls in a cluster held together by a common theme - the Kingdom.

We have to think twice to find the right name for them. They are all instances of fine purpose fiction, but they are too short for novels, or novelettes, or short stories, or even vignettes. Let us just call them gems. They seem the more like gems because their very smallness makes them shine the more brightly.

The writer once had a teacher of whom it was said that he threw out the rarest gems as carelessly as though they were common stones. The fact that he did so, however, only made them shine the more brightly. That is the case here. Jesus tossed these four little parables out as though they were just incidental thoughts, yet together they tell us in a masterful way two of the important things we must realize about the Kingdom - its vital nature and its supreme value.

They are the parables of the mustard seed, the leaven, the hidden treasure, and the pearl of great price. They are all familiar to Bible readers and most others who are at all familiar with good literature, but usually in an individual way. Here let us rather think of them as parts of a unit of kingdom thinking, perhaps a shield each of the two sides of which carries a message. Though each is a great utterance within itself, we will think of them as a group - four great parables strung together on the Kingdom theme. They make all the greater piece of Kingdom teaching because each is a great teaching within itself.

There are cases where brevity tells more than length could do. If a few words can be made to tell the story it can be better understood and remembered than would a longer and more involved discussion. This is one of those cases. Any one of these parables, none more than two verses long, can be easily memorized. They are especially suitable for meditation because they stand out like gleaming lights on the page and can easily be concentrated upon.

It takes a master to be the author of such expressions. It happens that nearly all of the most treasured gems of expression are brief, like the Lord's Prayer, Lincoln's Gettysburg address, and some of the loved poems and songs. Jesus outmastered all the others in compressing great meanings into a few words.

A study of these four parables will yield you two great values and many lesser ones. Two great values, already mentioned, are as many close views of the working of the mind of the Master and a clear glimpse of certain facets of the kingdom of life of which He dreamed.

After this lesson you will probably never think of any one of them without thinking of the others. That will mean that you have gained a more unified view of the Kingdom, which in turn will mean that you can better lay hold of and

live by the total idea.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

IN all such discussions as these we keep talking about the Kingdom of Heaven till we might get to doing so thoughtlessly. We should try to know and keep clearly in mind what we mean by it. It is one of the most important combinations of words in the language, and only by having some comprehension of its meaning can we interpret the meaning of any of its parts, such as the parables. What is the Kingdom of Heaven, and why do we find it so frequently referred to in the teachings of Jesus?

Studying his life and words as a whole you can easily see a central theme representing a central purpose in them. You can see that he was seeking to set in motion forces that would accomplish two things. The first was to bring about a better understanding of the old religious beliefs of his people and to get them better observed. The second was to get this right living integrated into a world life that would reform conditions into a new and better order of things, a condition in which right would prevail and all men would live as brothers united in the fatherhood of God.

This great hope has been called various names by others, but Jesus called it the Kingdom of Heaven. It is not so much a plan, though, to get people into heaven as it is to get heaven into people. It does not deal with a life yet to be lived, but with the one that is being lived now. The implication is that the life beyond the grave is not the point from which to start but the one at which to arrive. Immortality will take care of itself if mortality is rightly managed, and the best we can do about the life to come is to live this one well. Please, dear Student, let this thought permeate your entire being every day.

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Living this life well must begin in the heart; that is, in the thought life and the emotional life. But it must not end there. It must work itself out first into action and then into relationships till rightness in personal lives becomes rightness in the lives of nations and races and, through them, in the life of the world.

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That is the "new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness" of which Peter wrote in his second letter. It is what John referred to when he wrote, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away", the condition for which his name was the New Jerusalem or the City of God.

The old earth life is gradually coming to an end every day as people learn better how to think, and live, and let the right living of individuals merge into the right living of the race. Every time an old wrong dies a little of the old world passes, and every time an improvement is made in the human lot and the human spirit a little of the new world comes into being. This growing order of the worship of God by the doing of his will on earth is the gradually appearing Kingdom of Heaven.

That is the thing about which Jesus was talking, of which he was dreaming, and toward which he was working. It is that to which we keep fitting in better as we learn to know and live by the truth. It is that toward which these parables look and the nature of which they seek to explain.

THE MUSTARD SEED. MATTHEW 13:31-32.

THE parable of the mustard seed might just as well have been the parable of an acorn or a grain of wheat. The principle involved would have been the same - life and growth. The wording of the parable hints that Jesus chose the mustard seed on which to build the story because it is so small and it seems the more amazing that the processes of growth would turn it into anything so large.

Hold a grain of mustard seed in your hand. Look at it if your eyes are strong enough to see it. It is hard to imagine that this little black object holds within itself the making of a tree. The same is true of any living seed. It almost makes one dizzy to think how much can be bound up in so little.

The contents of a few grain bags are the making of a whole field of corn or wheat. A pocketful of nuts hides the makings of a whole grove of great trees. A handful of seed will turn into a whole garden of flowers.

This is the law of growth, of creation, of life. The Kingdom is not an organization. It is a life, the result of the developing of a divine vitality in the lives of the people who make up the human race.

Anything that is alive grows and advances. When it stops growing it, begins to die. While it is alive it never remains the same. It is always dynamic, never static. It is always becoming, always going on. The Kingdom is like that because, like a mustard seed, it has a germ of life at its heart, so it must grow.

What is the meaning of all this for you personally? First of all, BE SURE YOU ARE ALIVE. Don't assume that just because you breathe, and eat, and move about, you are alive. These things only prove that you exist, not necessarily that you are alive. Does life tingle to your fingertips and throb through your being? Are you alert to joy, beauty, loved ones, friends, inspiring thoughts, nature, spiritual values? Is the sense of wonder strong within you? Do you react to simple things and hold no thing or person common? If so, then you ARE alive. Age does not matter when you are a part of the Kingdom.

Second, be sure that your life is open to the impulses and influences of its Maker and Keeper. The power of God gives it the touch that makes it life indeed. When you live to do His will the Kingdom is dawning in you, and the purpose of existence is being realized.

Third, be sure that the kingdom life that is dawning in you does not stop developing till it is full grown and its purpose realized. If you stop short of that you could become a bottleneck or a log-jam in the progress of making the new world life. Give the Kingdom impulse free reign in your nature, and pass it on. That is what the mustard seed did, and it became a tree. When you do it

the result will be a better order in your life which will reach out and on as it plays its part in the making of a new and better order of things everywhere.

Notice that the growth of the mustard seed is not merely good, but good for something. The mustard tree is not merely beautiful. It fills a place and renders a service. That too must be a part of the Kingdom growth - to render service, to be a refuge, to give a value.

THE LEAVEN. MATTHEW 13:33.

NOW the great teacher throws a new picture on the screen. It is a powerful story, yet it takes but a single verse to tell it. The general significance is the same - life and growth - but the imagery changes and the implications vary a little. This, briefly told as it is, is a story familiar to all who have been brought up in old-fashioned homes - that of a woman who mixed a little yeast in some batter and kept it warm till in due time the yeast cells multiplied, and the mass increased, and all was leavened.

Many of us can remember this process - mixing the batter, stirring the yeast in it, setting the vessel containing the mixture at just the right distance from a source of heat, and turning it just often enough and far enough for the warmth to penetrate all of it, till the mixture filled the vessel by the multiplication of the yeast cells.

The housewife knew how to clock the process even without a timepiece, to empty the vessel before the batter spilled over, and to take the little lump of dough now grown large, and prepare it for the baking. What had happened had happened because the yeast cells were alive.

Again it is the Kingdom principle - development through the multiplying of life units. Whether it is by the adding of growth rings, or the building out of growing edges, or the multiplication of living cells in a mixture, the means and the meaning are the same.

The Kingdom of better things is like that. It begins with the growth of an idea in human minds. We catch it and let it unfold till it has become a larger and stronger life. Then we share it till it takes root in other minds and becomes a collective life. The plan is that this process should continue till it becomes a world life, till it has leavened the whole lump. This is all based on the fact that life, whether at its best or not, is a growing thing. Our task is to see that it is at its best.

But growth requires favorable conditions and faithful care. We do not plant seed in the soil and go away and forget it. We need to weed it, and tend it, and spray it, and do whatever is necessary to give it a chance. We do not put yeast in batter and forget it. We watch it, and time it, and keep it warm, that its growth may be sure.

We must expect to do no less with the grade of character and the quality of life we wish to nourish in ourselves. Improved understanding, selfhood, and conduct, will not just happen without attention and care. The Kingdom of the better life will not force itself on us. We must invite it into warm hearts and

open minds, and we must maintain our welcome through faithful nurture.

Do not expect this to come about instantaneously. It is a growth. Do not be discouraged if the goal is not attained in an hour or a day. As long as progress is being made, be content and keep trying. Do your part and give the law of growth a chance. One day the unfoldment will be complete. Character growth is something which must be worked at every day.

THE HIDDEN TREASURE. MATTHEW 13:44.

NOW we pass to the second couplet of parable gems of the Kingdom found in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. They follow logically what has been said about the Kingdom being a living, and therefore a growing, thing. They emphasize the fact that it is also a very precious thing, worth any price it costs.

The first parable is the story of a man who learned that in a certain field a treasure was buried, a treasure so rich that he had an overwhelming desire to possess it. The value was high, so high that he considered it worth any sacrifice he could make, even to the amount of everything he had. That is exactly what he paid for it, for he sold everything he had and bought the field.

After the style of certain modern fiction he would undoubtedly have taken a short cut by going at night, stealing the treasure, and leaving the field to its baffled and helpless owner. There are two good reasons why this story does not run that way. One is that the heroes in the master's stories are not that kind of men. The other is that since the treasure represents the kingdom of heaven it was impossible, for certainly the kingdom of heaven cannot be gained by dishonest means. It can be obtained only by paying the price.

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That is exactly the point in this parable. The Kingdom is the most precious value in the world. Without it no one is rich, however much he may possess. With it no one is poor, however little beside it he may have.

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You may say that one cannot buy the Kingdom, and that is true. The story likens it to something that really cannot be bought with money, but this figure is used only to make the idea clear. The value of the Kingdom has no dollar mark. It is measured in effort, sacrifice, self-discipline, obedience, and devotion. It means these things all the rest of your life, so the price is really your all.

You may say that the kingdom of heaven is not an article of trade. Again you are right. It isn't, but it is planted and grown, and it does have a value. It really is a treasure planted in a field, and getting it takes one's best.

You may say that this is an individual process and has nothing to do with the Kingdom as a whole. Yes, it has everything to do with it. The world kingdom is only the sum total of all the individual possessings of the Kingdom made by

lives like yours. Without the items there could be no total.

So find the life that is meant by the kingdom of heaven and possess it as the stay and adornment of your life. Whatever you have to do to possess it, do it. Whatever you have to give up, give it up gladly. Whatever endurance it takes to follow it through on it, count it all joy. A kingdom is a responsibility. Meet it gladly and perform its duties faithfully. You will find it the best investment you ever made. You will always be grateful to have found the field where your treasure lay.

THE PEARL. MATTHEW 13:45-46.

IN the second case as in the first, Jesus puts together two parables that emphasize the same point, this time the supreme value of the Kingdom. The addition of another parable making the same points throws heavy emphasis on the fact that to the importance of possessing the Kingdom no other possession is comparable. The lesson is the same. Only the figure changes. Unity in variety again.

You know by heart the little story as it came from the fertile mind of the master story teller who could shape these little narratives so deftly and quickly in the flow of discourse, each framing a shining jewel of priceless truth.

It tells how a jewel merchant heard of a pearl more perfect and valuable than any other known, and felt that he must have it. So he sold all his property to raise enough to buy it and add it to his collection. The story is simple and brief, yet it throbs with possible emotions and bristles with great meanings. Remembering that the pearl is not a gem but the kingdom of heaven, let us look for some of those meanings.

For one thing, this man was commendable in that he wanted the best. He already doubtless had lovely pearls, but none of them was the best. One of them might possibly have been second best, but still it was not the best.

The rare soul is looking for and seeking to attain the best. He is a natural candidate for the Kingdom because it is the best in living. There is nothing second rate about it. It stands always at the top. It is the apex. It is excellence in life for those who crave the excellent. It is the jewel of living for those who realize how like a jewel life can be made. Always strive for perfection. It is possible to attain it.

For another thing, such a life value requires sacrifice. To possess it one must be willing to give up less important things to make room for it and omit less important endeavors to take proper care of it. In other words, he has to sell all that he has to buy this pearl of great price.

Nothing is said about what the man did with the pearl of great price after he acquired it, but the implication may be that he kept it. For what other purpose would he want a gem so perfect and valuable? The more precious the pearl was the more limited would be the market for it. Who else would want to pay so much?

The kingdom of heaven can only be acquired to keep. No one could make a profit on it, and no one would want to give it up after going to all the trouble to get it. Nor would one worthy of possessing it keep it just for show.

The kingdom of heaven in a life has two important uses, and neither of them is to dispose of it for gain. One is to motivate the life and work of its possessor and make his presence one little place that reminds people of heaven. The other is so to live it as to make it a demonstration to people of what life can be when one tries to give it the beauty and worth of the pearl of great price. Nothing else could be so alluring as the personality of one who has sought the kingdom of heaven on earth and asked that it begin in him.

We are all pearl merchants. Perhaps you possess some lovely gems, but the fairest you can have is the spirit of the kingdom of heaven.

YOU ARE THE CENTRAL FIGURE

WHEN you read, hear, or remember the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price, always realize that, potentially at least, YOU are the central figure in the story. YOU are the one who has heard where there is a buried treasure. Will you find it? YOU are the one who has heard of a pearl of great price. Will you make it your own? That you may do so is the whole aim and purpose of this lesson. But remember that in each parable the central figure not only acquired the treasure, but he also paid the price. That you must do, and that you will be forever grateful you did. The treasure is life at its best. What is too much to pay for that, and what must we pay for it?

We must desire the Kingdom quality of character and life more than anything else in the world.

We must prepare ourselves to receive that quality of character and life by ridding our lives of all the rubbish that takes up room and occupies our time, and by keeping ourselves in a receptive mood.

We must know what the best quality of character and living is, so we can recognize our treasure when we find it.

We must keep worthy of the ideals we gain. They are fragile as fine glass or china. One slip can cause disaster.

We must cultivate first-rate viewpoints and habits faithfully. This is not a condition but a progress. If we allow ourselves to stand still we begin slipping back. When one starts to slip there is never any telling how far he will go.

We must deny ourselves everything that lowers our quality of character and living. At first this may seem like sacrifice, but it grows easier till at last it becomes a privilege. When we become normal we begin to enjoy normal things.

We must exercise the ideals of quality living we acquire, doing

whatever duty we see and accepting every opportunity to strengthen our purposes.

We must do so well with our treasures of kingdom living that our lives will take on its appearance so others will notice its worth and desire it for themselves.

We must live this life happily, realizing that it does not enslave us, but rather sets us free from low ideals, petty viewpoints, and ruinous tendencies and influences.

We must do these things as long as we live, for once we drop the treasure we have so fortunately found and so dearly bought, it is lost and we can find it again only with difficulty, if at all.

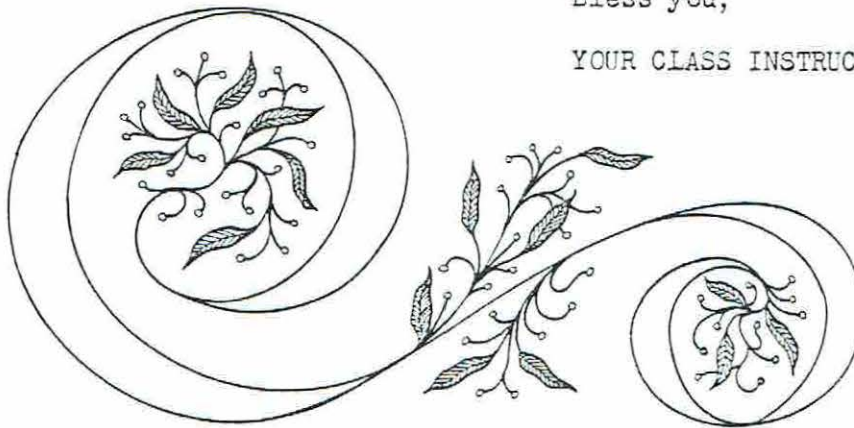
That is the price you must pay for the best life you are capable of living and the best work you are capable of doing; and it is the greatest bargain that will ever be offered you. Will you accept it?

PRAYER

I Heavenly Father, I thank thee for the treasures that are priceless and yet may be mine. Make me diligent in the seeking, grateful in the finding, willing in the possessing, and faithful in the using. Amen.

Bless you,

YOUR CLASS INSTRUCTOR.



Your next lesson is entitled PREPAREDNESS, Matt. 25:1-13, and in it we take up the following subjects:

THE TEN VIRGINS
EXPECTATION
DIFFERENTIATION

DELAY
SLUMBER
THE BRIDEGROOM COMETH

NOT TRANSFERABLE

