

The Parable of the Householder

Intro: Are you a collector? Almost everywhere I have been I have found people eager to show others their possessions, things that are important or valuable to them. Sometimes it is an antique or heirloom of great value. Sometimes it is a photo of a family member. Sometimes it is a recent purchase of something that is useful and unique. Not a few times I have visited in someone's home and a box would be brought out with a collection of some kind—anything from rocks to arrowheads to coins or stamps. Jesus capitalized on this human tendency to teach a final important lesson about the kingdom of God—the parable of the householder.

The parable of the householder

And He said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old." (Matthew 13:51-52)

"Every scribe"

When Jesus said "every scribe" the disciples would have naturally thought of those scribes who were an important part of Jewish religious culture. They were copyists of the Scriptures. Through the process of repeated copying they were able to know its contents. Presumably "scribes" would be the people who had the greatest mastery of the OT revelation of God. And if they were of a spiritual heart they would have the greatest understanding of God. This knowledge they were expected to share with others like Ezra did (Ez. 7:6,10).

Thus Jesus' parable appears to speak about someone among this group of copyists.

"Who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven"

"Every" scribe but not "any" scribe.

The Greek term Jesus uses is a participle form of the word "disciple" and conveys the idea of a scribe who has become a "disciple of the kingdom of heaven", i.e. he has become committed to the teachings of Jesus and through those teaching entered the "kingdom of heaven" of which Jesus spoke.

More than once scribes are mentioned as approaching Jesus.

Regrettably most of them were hostile to Jesus and His teachings.

They were among those who led in His crucifixion.

In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him, and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him. (Matthew 27:41-42)

But there were a few men who came to believe in Jesus and found among the disciples of Jesus.

"Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you

*will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city,
(Matthew 23:34)*

“Is like a head of a household who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old”.

The expression “head of a household” translates two common Greek words for someone who owns a house or property. Something like man or master of the household.

The word “treasure” translates the Greek word “thesauros” (from which we get the English word meaning a “collection” or our English word “treasury”. It can mean either “a treasure chest” or a “storage room” or it can mean the treasure itself (what is stored or the valuable that is kept in a safe place).

The words “new” and “old” are obviously contrasting terms to describe treasures of the past vs. the present (antiques vs. new items). Keener suggest that the picture is that of a “householder paying out old and new coins kept in a strongbox hidden in his home” (Keener, OT Background Commentary).

Capon states, “Therefore the bringing forth referred to here by Jesus is no rummage-sale unloading of junk; rather it is a displaying of rare treasures for the fascination of the castle guests” (Robert F. Capon, The Parables of the Kingdom, 166).

So the picture is very much like those people who bring out their collections to show their guests.

But what is the message?

What “treasure” did the scribe possess before becoming a disciple? The answer is God’s OT revelation and the blessings that attended it.

The law of Thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces. (Psalm 119:72)

They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. (Psalm 19:10)

What “treasure” did the scribe possess after becoming a disciple? The answer is the God’s NT revelation and the blessings that attend it.

*To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, (Ephesians 3:8)
in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
(Colossians 2:3)*

The scribe, the person who best knew the OT revelation had nothing to lose by accepting the teaching of Jesus Christ, but had everything to gain. He would not be forced to cast aside the treasure of God’s OT revelation, but would, in fact, continue to be enriched by it as he gained along with it the riches of God’s NT revelation in Christ. Thus he could bring forth from his treasure things new and old.

Important lessons

Understanding the “mysteries” of the kingdom (God’s NT revelation) is essential to being an effective disciple of Jesus and teacher of the gospel.

Jesus prefaced this parable with a question to the disciples, “Have you understood all these things”? Jesus’ question to the disciples underscores the importance of reflecting upon and understanding His kingdom parables. That’s why we’ve spent seven Sundays talking about them.

If we understand God’s purposes, then our work will align with them and we will succeed. If we do not understand God’s purposes, then we will be fighting against God’s purposes and our work is destined to fail.

Even the most unlikely candidate for the gospel can be converted if his heart is right!

The scribe of Jesus’ day would have been an unlikely target for conversion. Most of them had minds like concrete—“thoroughly set and all mixed up”. But even so the Lord pronounced the optimistic prospect of some of them being made disciples.

The person who wants the truth will overcome all previous misconceptions in order to attain the treasures of truth.

The NT disciple does not abandon the treasure of OT revelation.

Jesus was not some kind of spiritual iconoclast who sought to dismantle all that previous revelation had established about God and His ways. Nor are we; even though people have often said, “The church of Christ doesn’t believe in the OT”.

The OT revelation of God has great value to the kingdom disciple and the NT disciple will seek to master it too so that he can tap into the riches of God’s previous revelations! The NT itself offers insight into this value:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (1 Corinthians 10:11)

The OT is not a law to be obeyed in its particulars; but a source of learning based on these NT statements concerning the proper use of it.

The NT disciple uses the “new” revelation of the gospel to understand the nature of OT promises.

I have been amazed at the “spin” that premillennialists put upon the kingdom parables. Because of their determination to literalize the OT prophecies concerning Israel, they are forced to treat the kingdom parables as if they predict an “interim” kingdom which the OT had

not revealed and reserve the OT prophecies for a future fulfillment in Israel.

I submit that the kingdom parables are God's way of teaching the NT disciple how to interpret OT promises. The parables of Jesus give us insight into how the OT kingdom prophecies were to be fulfilled. The kingdom of OT prophecy was not a promise of the salvation of all Jews as a nation; but a prophecy of the salvation of all the nations including the Jews! In fact, the "mystery" parables undermine the premillennial concept of the kingdom on every point:

The parables make it abundantly clear that the kingdom belongs not to all Jews or just Jews, but to all those who receive the word of the kingdom with a good and honest heart. The parable of the tares makes it clear that the kingdom will co-exist with the unbelieving world instead of existing alone. The parables of the leaven shows that the kingdom will not conquer the world in sudden victory but overcome it slowly and invisibly.

The treasures of God's revelation are not to be hidden away but made known to others.

What Jesus said about the scribe goes for all who become disciples. We see this parable fulfilled in the experience of Paul.

And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ." (Acts 17:2-3)

The treasure was made to be shared. Perhaps Jesus felt a special need to remind the disciples of this truth. If you do indeed understand what has been spoken, then you have a moral and spiritual responsibility to share that information with others.

Conclusion: Each of us probably has in their home special things they would be eager to show others; but the best thing you have in your home to show is not physical, but spiritual. It is the word of God, properly understood and lived before men. To bring forth that treasure for all to see is to enrich everyone around you!