

Views from the Pews: The Kingdom of God, part 3: Kingdom parables

How might we best interpret the parables Jesus used to teach about the “Kingdom”? For me, the most useful starting point is always with the question, “To whom, or to what does Jesus liken the Kingdom of God?” If I don’t get this right, I risk missing the point of the parable. For example, in the parable of the Sower, many interpreters assume that Jesus was teaching about the different ways in which people respond to the Gospel. Valuable as that insight might be, it misses the point he was making. In Matthew 13: 18, Jesus names the parable as that of the Sower. Thus, his teaching is not about our response to the Gospel, but about the generous and totally impartial grace of God.

For another example, go to the parables of the treasure and the merchant (Mt13:44-46, Good News Bible translation). For some reason, these translators missed the literal Greek and translated these two parables as follows.

"The Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man happens to find a treasure hidden in a field. He covers it up again and is so happy that he goes and sells everything he has, and then goes back and buys that field.

Also, the Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man is looking for fine pearls, and when he finds one that is unusually fine, he goes and sells everything he has, and buys that pearl."

From this version, it appears that the two are saying the same thing. “The Kingdom of God is infinitely precious, and we should seek it above all else”.

However, the NRSV is more cautious. It treats the reader to a startling and very encouraging discovery that would otherwise be missed.

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; 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; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

This is a quite different perspective on the Kingdom of God. Properly understood, it should stun us. Jesus is teaching that *we ourselves* are seen by God as so infinitely precious that no price is too great that he might redeem us.

Phil Wilson