

Pentecost X: Matthew 13:44-52: Three Kingdom Parables

1. There are seven parables in Mt. 13. After Jesus spoke the first, The Sower, the disciples asked: "Why do you speak to them in parables?" He explained in detail (vss. 11-17) and then explained this first parable. Then He spoke three more parables. After dismissing the crowds, in the house the disciples asked for an explanation of the Parable of the Tares. Then He spoke the three parables in today's pericope. From vss. 51-52 we see that, under the tutelage of Jesus, the disciples had made progress in understanding. Jesus adds a word concerning the substance of the teaching of a true teacher of the Kingdom. Vs. 52 contains a little parable, a simile.
2. Vs. 44: In this parable the Kingdom of Heaven is compared to a thing, a treasure. This is the Gospel. A treasure is something which is prized highly. It was κεκρυμμένον, utterly concealed. ἐν τῷ ἄγρῳ, close at hand. Cf. Rom 10:8 and Deut. 30:11-14. The Word of God and its precious Gospel are very available to mankind but is completely hidden and meaningless until God Himself reveals the meaning. The antecedent of ὄν is θεσσαυρός, not ἄγρός. εὗρων means that he found it quite accidentally. An example would be the woman at the well at Sychar, Jn. 4. She came seeking earthly water but, in the providence of God, found the water of life. Another example would be St. Paul in Acts 9. In God's providence He found the Lord while he was intent on persecuting Him. ἐκρυψε, AAT: "he buried it again." This does not mean that it was meaningless to him but that he prized it very highly. καὶ means "and then". The ἀπὸ clause is causal. αὐτοῦ is subjective. He himself is very happy. The word χαρὰ is used at least fifty-nine times in the NT. Except for its use in an axiom (Jn. 16:21) it is never used of unregenerate man. It is used often of the joy of faith, especially in trying circumstances and deep sorrow. It is used of the angels (Lk. 15:7,10). It is used of heaven itself (Mt. 25:21,23). It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). The last part of this verse (44) means that the treasure of the Gospel (the Kingdom of Heaven) means much more to him than all else. Read Philippians 3:2-11. Of all Jews Paul could have based his relationship to God on earthly prerogatives and works more than any other Jew. But when God revealed the Gospel to him, Paul considered all previous gain loss, dung, manure. He had found the righteousness of God which came to him by faith, quite apart from works and human worthiness. Read the account of Zacchaeus in Lk. 19:1-10. In his curiosity merely to see Jesus, Jesus found him. Christian pastors, teachers and laymen have often witnessed the wonder of this parable. They have been instrumental in revealing the Kingdom of Heaven, the Gospel, to people in a way which looked so accidental but was actually quite providential. By the way, this parable is not saying that Christians should despise their earthly stewardship (marriage, work, family, money, human relationships). Kretzmann rightly says, with reference to Col. 3:1-2, "In the right use of the earthly things entrusted to us, we really mind and seek heavenly things."
3. Vs. 45: Πάλιν, another parable very similar to the previous one, and yet different. This time the Kingdom is compared to a person, a merchantman. An ἔμπορος is a merchant who travels far and wide to buy wares. Note that this man is a "seeker" (ζητοῦντι). In illustration he is seeking καλοῦς μαργαρίτας, excellent jewels. Note that it is plural, not singular.
4. Vs. 46: εὗρων is used precisely as in vs. 44. Though he is seeking, he comes upon, accidentally finds. This time it is ἓνα, just one. It is not merely excellent but πολυτίμον of high value. ἀπελθὼν means that he has ceased searching. πέρακεν is synonymous to πωλεῖ in vs. 44, but has the added feature of selling lastingly. The antecedent of αὐτόν is μαργαρίτης. During his seminary days the writer of these notes knew a colloquy student who had been highly trained at a seminary in another denomination. After he was ordained into the ministry he married a LCMS girl who became a Sunday School teacher in his church. This pastor was dissatisfied with the materials put out by his church. He was searching for better materials. All that while his wife was using true Lutheran materials in

her class. The parents of the children were impressed with what their children were learning. They reported it to the pastor. He looked into the matter. Then he resigned his ministry and came to Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. He would sit up late reading the Bible, the Lutheran Confessions and our dogmaticians. He was enthralled with what he had "found" in the providence of God. He often chided the rest of us for not being more excited than we were concerning Luthern doctrine. He was graduated and ordained into the Lutheran ministry. Just like this merchantman who sold that which he was possessing and bought that single precious jewel.

5. Vs. 47: This parable is very similar to that of the tares among the wheat (vss. 24-30), for which the disciples asked for an explanation (vss. 36-42). But this time Jesus did not have to explain. That becomes important in vss. 51-52. The Kingdom of Heaven is again the Gospel. It is compared to a σαγήνη, a dragnet. Such a net is dragged in the water between two boats which are quite a distance from each other. The net is dragged towards the shore. Both βληθειση and συναγαγούση are adjectival. καὶ means "and then". ἐκ παντὸς γένους is actually adjectival, modifying the elliptical word "fish".
6. Vs. 48: According to the reading in the Nestle text ἦν to αἰγιαλὸν is an adjectival clause. The antecedent of ἦν is σαγήνη, vs. 47. ἀναβιβάζω is a transitive verb meaning "to bring onto land". ὅτε ἐπληρώθη is a subordinate temporal clause modifying the main verb συνέλεξαν. This verb is modified by two circumstantial participles, ἀναβιβάσαντες and καθίσαντες. The latter, as often, denotes deliberate action. Cf. συνέλεξαν to the same verb used in vss. 28-30. τὰ καλὰ is opposed to τὰ σαπρὰ "the useful-the worthless." εἰς ἄγην is opposed to ἐξω "into safe keeping-back into the water." By the way, ἐπληρώθη, in application means "when the Gospel, according to the will of God, has completed its work among men." Finally, συνέλεξαν is opposed to ἔβαλον, "gathered together-threw away".
7. Vs. 49: Very similar to vss. 41-43, but this time there is no mention of the gathering of the righteous into heaven. This parable ends only on a note of warning. Evidently Jesus means that all of us should examine ourselves. ἀφοριούσιν means "to separate out". ἐκ μέσου means "from everywhere among". τοὺς πονηροὺς is opposed to τῶν δικαίων "the actively evil-the righteous"; "the impenitent-the penitent". The Christian must constantly listen to Mt. 3:2 and 4:17. Luther said: "When our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said 'Repent ye' He meant that the whole life of the Christian must be one of repentance." The Kingdom of God, Christ and His wonderful Gospel, is present in the Word.
8. Vs. 50: This vs. needs no further comment for it is identical to vs. 42 and has already been treated.
9. Vs. 51: Συνήκατε "have you gained insight into these things?" Note that He says ταῦτα πάντα which refers first and foremost to vss. 44-50, but surely covers all seven parables of which Jesus Himself explained two. Furthermore, in vss. 11-17 He explained why He spoke in parables. It is clear that Jesus Himself caused the disciples to gain insight into all these things. They did not do it on their own. They answer "Yes".
10. Vs. 52: διὰ τοῦτο "for this reason", namely, that He Himself had caused the understanding. πᾶς γραμματεὺς is translated with "every Bible student" by AAT. These notes do not agree with those who think that Jesus is drawing a comparison between the scribes, who were Jesus' contemporaries, and His disciples. μαθητευθεὶς to οὐρανῶν is adjectival and therefore γραμματεὺς speaks of a specific kind of Bible student, the right kind. Cf. Mt. 23:29 and 34. In vs. 29 Jesus speaks of scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. In vs. 34 He links γραμματεῖς with prophets and wise men. The second

reference has a totally different meaning. Nor do these notes go along with those who say that Jesus is drawing a comparison between true OT teachers and true NT teachers. Of course the fulfillment of the Kingdom of Heaven came in the person, Word and work of Jesus (Mt. 4:17) but it was there by way of promise and prophecy in the OT. Nor is Jesus here speaking only of His immediate disciples and Apostles. He is speaking axiomatically of all true Christian teachers, be they pastors or laymen. Herewith we list the acceptable translations:

AV: Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven.

NKJV: Every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven.

AAT: Every Bible student trained for the kingdom of heaven.

But the following are rejected for various reason:

LB: Those experts in Jewish Law who are now my disciples have double treasure--from the OT as well as from the New.

TEV: Every teacher of the Law who becomes a disciple in the Kingdom of heaven.

NIV: Every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven.

JB: Every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom.

NEB: When therefore a teacher of the law has become a learner in the kingdom of heaven.

NASB: Every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven.

LB is rejected for obvious reasons. The remainder imply that Jesus is speaking about Jewish scribes who became Christians. The text does not say that. He is speaking about every Bible student who knows the true meaning of the Gospel. He is like the head of a household, who is responsible for providing generously (ἐκβάλλει) for those entrusted to his care, no matter what that provision may be. ἐκ denotes source. A householder needs money to provide. A Christian teacher needs a store of Christian knowledge in order to teach. That knowledge has become his very own (αὐτοῦ). καινὰ καὶ παλαιά, new and old. By the way, νέα means "brand new". καινὰ means "new in quality". The Christian teacher does not present "brand new" teaching but always that which is new in quality. The καινὰ do not differ from the παλαιά in kind. He never leaves the basic principles. They are always presented in fresh and living garb. This is a warning to pastors who, for lack of study, preach the same sermon Sunday for Sunday and thus turn their hearers off.