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Hidden treasures

Matthew 13, 44

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

In more ancient times there were many wars. A bloody sword, alarm poles, bugles, burning hay bales were used to spread the alert that enemy forces were approaching. The men armed themselves, the women and children went into hiding. The wealthy took time to hide their possessions. Thinking that they may soon perish, they buried their gold as if returning it to the earth, the source it came from. If God blesses them with surviving the war, then the earth, like a faithful servant, will return their buried treasure. The buried treasure of those who died on the battlefield remained in the silent confines of the ground. Now and then, by accident, a lucky fellow would find the treasure, and then, he would sell everything he owned to buy that parcel of land, so he, now the rightful owner of the land, can unearth the hidden treasure.

In the times of Jesus' life people occasionally found buried treasure, and that event would significantly change the life of the discoverer. For Jesus the metaphor of "hidden treasure" must have been a straightforward choice in this parable. "How should I illustrate the Kingdom of God? I'll compare it to a hidden treasure". I'm convinced that Jesus didn't improvise his parables and metaphors, but they were well thought out, and the result of conscious choice. Jesus inserted these into his teachings only if the parables and metaphors had the power to explain and to illustrate. Such powerful explanation is visible in the parable of the hidden treasure. Can this parable truly express the essence of Kingdom of God? I believe so.

1. First, let us examine if the word "treasure" is a fitting expression to describe the Kingdom of God. For the faithful the Kingdom of God is indeed a treasure; it is most precious, truly invaluable.
2. A treasure found buried in the ground usually had several pieces to it. That rusted box had other valuables besides gold. The word "treasure" is an umbrella term; it includes gold, silver, diamonds and pearls. The Kingdom of God is also an umbrella concept; it includes the silver of truth, the gold of

kindness, the diamond of beauty, and the pearl of faith. Those all put together make up the most precious valuable, the Kingdom of God. This is how the “treasure” metaphor illustrates the Kingdom of God.

3. However, Jesus didn’t just define the Kingdom of God, but he also illustrates The details of it as well. For example, from the parable it is clear that the treasure didn’t belong to the man who found it, as it belonged to another, possibly wealthy individual. The man who found the treasure had to dig it up, perhaps melted it into bars, or shaped it into a new object. Likewise, the treasure we call the Kingdom of God, and its precious parts, such as truth, kindness, beauty don’t belong to us, as they belong to God. We only partake in the treasures according to God’s will, and according to our own willful activities. The source of all treasures in our souls is God. It is God who makes the treasures of truth, kindness, and beauty available for us. God is the creator and the guardian of the treasures, and God is the one who disperses them into the world. We may find these treasures, and we become the new owners after hard work and sacrifices.

4. Now let us examine just how appropriately the parable shows us in what way the treasures of the Kingdom of God may be revealed to us. In the parable the treasure in the field is not just lying around openly visible. The treasure is hidden in the ground. Well now, aren’t the treasures of the Kingdom of God hidden? They are hidden, more specifically, hidden inside of us. As the ground of the field in the parable is a metaphor for us, where the treasures are hidden.

Here is an important question to consider: Just why God keeps the treasure hidden? And why is it described as “hidden” in the parable as well? Why isn’t the treasure placed out in the open, uncovered above ground? When I was a child every Tuesday my mother would bring us candy from town. But she never gave it to us directly; instead, she hid the candy, and she set two conditions: one being that we had to search out the hidden candy, and the second being that we had to do something in exchange for the candy. My mother knew that if she just handed us the candy without us having to search for it, and without us having to do something in exchange, then we wouldn’t appreciate and value the treasures: the candy and my mother’s kindness. My mother put us onto the path of excitement during the search, and onto the path of satisfaction when we found the candy. With those small tasks that we had to do in exchange for the candy, she wanted to make us feel that we didn’t receive a free gift, but we received something we worked for, and so we became the rightful owner of the candy.

A wise teacher wouldn’t just bring to the students a new course topic, but rather, the teacher would conceal some of the truths of science or ethics, and would pretend that he needs assistance from students to find those truths.

So, he would request help from the students to assist with finding the hidden truths. Teaching is nothing else but a search for the knowledge goal or for the pedagogical goal; the shared sacrifices to find those hidden truths, the shared excitement during the search, and the shared happiness once the hidden truth is found.

The wisdom of God is very much like the wisdom of a great teacher. God doesn't serve the Kingdom of God on a silver platter. Instead, God hides those treasures, and, thus, God allows us to enjoy the excitement of the search, the happiness of finding the treasure, and along the process God develops in us the appreciation of those treasures. And finally, God makes it possible for us to search for several treasures throughout our life. The teaching method of God includes motivation to start the search, the action of searching, and the act of collaboration. I hope I don't come across as sacrilegious, but God's pedagogical method is the Socratean heuristic method. I see that in Jesus' own words: "But seek first the Kingdom of God."

5. It is interesting that in this parable, similarly to others, Jesus uses the word "seek". At first thought we might be wondering how come we are expected to seek the hidden treasure, instead of developing it or building it up. Why didn't Jesus use the words: "build up", although that may have been a better fit with his direct communication style, and with the nature of the Kingdom of God? Usually, what we seek is already made, completed, but is hidden from us. Since the Kingdom of God is not completed, therefore, we can not seek it, but we can build it up. What about those Christians who teach that the Kingdom of God is perfectness, it is complete in Heaven, and we don't have to work on it or build it up, but we have to seek it, and be deserving of it? How might we resolve these contrary views? The solution is easier than you think. The meaning of the hiding of the treasure is not limited to the act of the hiding of the candy which is already made, and we just have to earn it and then seek it. Neither the meaning of the hiding of the treasure is limited to the metaphor of teaching where the learning material is already prepared, and we have to motivate students to look for it and to internalize it. The act of hiding has a deeper, more general meaning: the hiding of something as in the hiding something in a seed. When I pick up an apple seed, God has managed to hide an entire apple tree in there. In that apple seed hidden are the trunk, the leaves, the roots, and the fruit of the tree. Nothing in the seed is in the final form, but in the starter germ form. In the terminology of philosophy the apple seed is a potential, a possibility. The treasures hidden in the apple seed are waiting for us to discover it. How could we do that? Surely not by breaking and unfolding the seed, the way we would have unwrapped the candy we found after our search. We plant the seed, we water it, we take best care of it, and out of that effort the treasures appear,

the apple tree grows out. Yes, growing, cultivating, and developing are ways of seeking; as a matter of fact, they are the most involved forms of seeking. The Kingdom of God is hidden inside of us just as the germ of a tree is hidden in a seed. So, when we seek the Kingdom of God we don't seek it like we seek a hidden candy or a lost coin, but we seek by planting the seed, and then we nurture it, water it, weed around it, cultivate it, and then we harvest the fruit.

7. Someone could argue that in the parable the man didn't seek the treasure, but came upon it fortuitously. Did Jesus mean to say that we don't have to seek the Kingdom of God, but we just have to come upon it? I don't believe so. And here are two pieces of evidence for that. The first piece of evidence is that Jesus himself said: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God". The second piece of evidence is that in Jesus' time period there were many "treasure hunters". Josephus Flavius states that in his writings about the time period of Jesus. I'm convinced that on other occasions Jesus likely have said that the man found the treasure after seeking it. As Jesus himself stated in Matthew 7 verse 7: "Seek and ye shall find". Those who don't purposefully seek the Kingdom of God may only find it by accident. We have to acknowledge that there are instances of those accidental paths to finding a buried treasure. Similarly, finding the Kingdom of God may not only happen as the result of conscientious and gradual personal development, as sometimes people come across it surprisingly abruptly. One such instance is Saul, who in his youth didn't seek the Kingdom of God, yet, on that road to Damascus he suddenly found it. Another instance is of Augustine of Hippo, one of the great Christian theologians, who in his youth followed a hedonistic lifestyle, and showed no sign that he would be seeking or cultivating the Kingdom of God. But, despite all that prehistory, he found it after hearing just one sermon. In conclusion, while there are examples of people abruptly, suddenly finding the Kingdom of God, that doesn't invalidate our thesis: the need for seeking. Research into the personal religious sentiment has proven that in the soul of Saul, Augustine and the likes, there was already a slow, gradual, subconscious development of the germ of the Kingdom of God. They never consciously realized that such a development was unfolding in them. They only became consciously aware of the last stage of the process when the fruit has ripened, and the subsequent recognition burst onto the surface like a volcano. They have been seeking the Kingdom of God, they just didn't know it. They were building the Kingdom of God in themselves not consciously, but subconsciously. They were seeking deliberately and gradually not in the light of consciousness, but in the twilight of the subconscious.
8. In the parable the person who found the treasure sold all his possessions

to buy the land where the treasure was. In the time of Ancient Rome there was an unwritten rule that deeded the ownership of a found treasure to the owner of the land, but not to the person who found it. Now, the person who found the treasure could have stolen it, and maybe the landowner would not have noticed it. However, that person didn't want to break the law, he didn't want to cheat the landowner. He wanted to stay on the straight and narrow to gain hold of the treasure. Likewise, it is best to remain honorable and abide by the law when seeking the treasures of the Kingdom of God: truth, kindness and love.

"He goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" goes our parable. What a glorious demonstration of seeking of the Kingdom of God. We don't find the Kingdom of God without cost; we have to sacrifice for it. What exactly did the man do after finding the treasure? He exchanged two valuable things. He sold everything he owned, so he can obtain what he wanted. Cultivation of the Kingdom of God is just like that exchange. We exchange our low value possessions for higher value possessions. We exchange what we have for what we need, we exchange the feeble for the ideal. We exchange the mortal for the spiritual; we exchange the human for the divine. For example, if somebody sacrifices money, time, energy, concentration to seek the truth, if somebody sacrifices free time just to help a neighbor, if somebody sacrifices his life to better the fate of millions, these represent exchanges of valuables. The finding the Kingdom of God hinges on such an exchange. Now, there is a notable difference between us and the man in the parable. He sold everything, he sacrificed everything he owned so he could buy the land with the treasure. However, God doesn't demand everything we have in exchange for the Kingdom of God. What God is asking for is much smaller, daily sacrifices. God doesn't want our wealth, our ranks, our titles, our health, or our entire lives. We are getting a great bargain for the Kingdom of God. There is no one in this world who can't afford it, no one who would be unable to exchange valuables. God has set the exchanged value so low that even those who are not endowed with spiritual great riches can seek the Kingdom of God. It is worth remembering that our exchanges aim to give us the higher value.

The parable happened in front of us, outside of our bodies. However, the seeking, the searching, and the cultivating of the Kingdom of God happens inside of us. We are the field with the hidden treasure, hidden by God inside of us. Inside of us is the man seeking and finding the treasure. Not only the treasure is inside of us, but the desire, the will power, the motivation, and the effort to obtain the treasure as well. Inside of us is the excitement and the satisfaction we feel upon finding the treasure. Inside of us is the drive to bring about the exchange of our valuables. All that is inside of us.

So, let us begin seeking! That hidden treasure is awaiting all of us. All we need is our heart, our hands, our reasoning, our energy, our awareness, our desire, our drive, and we all can find the Kingdom of God. Amen