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A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expository-times\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php)

pdfs are named: [Volume]\_[Issue]\_[1<sup>st</sup> page of article].pdf

## Two Parables: A Study.

BY THE VENERABLE ARCHDEACON R. H. CHARLES, D.D., D.LITT., LL.D.

IN the thirteenth chapter of St. Matthew there are seven parables. These seven parables may have occurred in the same order in the original source, on which the first Evangelist drew, and their order may even possibly be the order in which our Lord stated them, but on this question we can arrive at no certain or even probable conclusion at present. Notwithstanding the fact that they are given in a certain order in St. Matthew is in the opinion of that Evangelist significant. Let us, then, in a few words attempt to set forth the line of thought that binds the first six together. The seven parables are the Sower, the Tares, the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, the Hid Treasure, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Net.

In the parable of the Sower we have the advent of the Divine Word in the world, but withal with no great apparent success. Of the four classes of mankind to whom it comes, to only one does the Divine Word become the power of an endless life. In the second parable, that of the Tares, we are given to know that the small and slight beginnings of the Kingdom shadowed forth in the first parable are beset with further and great dangers. An enemy is at work, who is ever striving to undo the labours of the Lord of Life. The prospect is full of gloom, and so, lest His followers should be tempted to despair, Christ declares under the figure of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven that His kingdom, though at first small and ineffective beyond all expectation, would nevertheless grow into an all-powerful Kingdom, which, like a mighty tree, would cover the earth with its great arms and foliage, and like leaven would leaven the whole world with its spirit, potency, and life: that its growth would be at once outward and inward, and its outer manifestation would keep pace with the development of its inner life. Herein we have the declaration of the final triumph of the Kingdom, which is likewise foretold in the beatitude, 'The meek shall inherit the earth.'

But, as in the parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven, Christ represents the Kingdom in its universal aspect; in those of the Hid Treasure, and the Pearl of Great Price, He sets it forth from the standpoint of the individual, and declares the

means by which a man becomes a citizen of His Kingdom. These two parables agree in emphasizing one great lesson—namely, the incomparable value of the Kingdom of God. However many really good things there may be, and there are many, it is the chief good, in respect of which all the rest are inconsiderable or as nothing. Hence both classes of men are represented in these two parables as selling all that they have in order to make this good thing their own.

Thus these two parables agree as to the incomparable value of the Kingdom. But in a very important respect they differ. They deal with two different types of men—the first with those who are not seeking it: the second with those who are. The parable of the Hid Treasure relates to those who have never discovered that there is a supreme end in life till they have come upon this truth unexpectedly: and so in their case 'Christ is found of them that sought him not.' On the other hand, the parable of the Seeker after goodly pearls relates to those who are assured that there are some or many good things in life, in the acquiring of which they shall find their heart's desire. And accordingly they set themselves to acquire these good things and spare no pains in the quest, till at last they come upon the one supreme good, which embraces all other good things within it.

But though these two classes of men are distinguished from each other in this important respect, there is also one essential characteristic in which they agree. Thus, when they come upon the treasure, they both take the same action—those who had never sought it at all and those who had sought it earnestly—they both take the same action—they at once proceed to sell all they possess in order to make this treasure their own. In both classes, therefore, there is the honest and good heart. Both are ready to part with all they have, when the supreme call comes. They may have been ardent seekers after pearls of great price, like St. Paul, Justin Martyr, Augustine, Luther; or, like the finders of the hid treasure, they may have never thought of the supreme ends of life at all: they may have been ordinary decent folk, thinking only of this world and its interests, or else gross repro-

bates, such as Mary Magdalene or the thief on the Cross, and the countless sinners who have found Christ though they sought Him not. Both classes alike possess in some degree the honest and good heart—that is openness to conviction, teachableness, single-mindedness. When a truth is set before such men and women, they start forward and take its side and give themselves up to it single-heartedly. When their sin is brought home to them, they do not attempt to palliate or shuffle out of it, but confess their guilt without excuse and without extenuation. Whatever, therefore, their previous life may have been, both classes are in greater or less degree open to conviction, teachable, single-minded.

As regards the finder of the hid treasure, his action in buying the field in order to make himself the owner of the treasure set him right with the requirements of the Rabbinic law,<sup>1</sup> but certainly did not set him right with equity. According to equity the finder virtually stole the treasure. While making the purchase, he deliberately suppressed the fact that the field contained treasure. But we are not concerned with the morality of this transaction any more than with that of the Unjust Steward in the parable, who was commended as in certain respects worthy of imitation though not in others, nor with that of the Unjust Judge in another parable, where in a certain respect the judge stands for God.

The morality of the man who purchases the field is ignored, and only the essential aim of the parable taken into account. And the essential aim of the parable is to enforce the duty of buying the field, even should its purchase require the finder of the treasure to sell everything else that he has in order to buy the field. When this fact is translated into its spiritual equivalent, it means just this, that there must be a selling and a buying in order to obtain the heavenly treasure. And the selling and the buying in this connexion express a man's willingness to give up, to sacrifice, everything that prevents his making the heavenly treasure his own. All have the wherewithal to buy the field; the price is the surrender of themselves to God in Christ. This surrender may involve very different degrees of sacrifice. When the supreme call comes to men, it finds some loving things that ought not to be loved at all, and others loving legitimate objects of affection far too well. From both alike it requires the absolute surrender of these, and, if

<sup>1</sup> See *Baba Mezia*, i. 4. 28<sup>b</sup>.

the demand is complied with, then the price required is paid, and both become citizens of the Kingdom of God.

But let us study more in detail the characters of the finder of the hid treasure and the seeker after goodly pearls. Now, if we paid attention only to the most typical members of these two classes of men, we should regard the finders of the hid treasure as men who had never shown any spirit of self-sacrifice in their conduct, or any discontent with their moral condition, or any deep desire after higher things: and we should regard the seekers after goodly pearls as men whose moral energies were ever on the stretch, whose vision was always fixed on something beyond the best they had, and who were ever ready to sacrifice any present comfort or possession in order to realize these aspirations. But in actual life the difference between these two classes is not so clearly marked. It is not true that the finders of the hid treasure never sacrifice selfish aims at the call of some high duty. Occasionally—and in some cases frequently—many men of very questionable character exhibit noble qualities. In ordinary life many a man may be most unselfish as a father, yet most unprincipled in business relations with his neighbours. He sacrifices the lower for the higher in one department of life, but in other departments he pursues only his selfish interests. In other words, he belongs to the finders of the hid treasure and not to the seekers after goodly pearls. In this class are to be found the numberless Esaus, who have often individual good points, charming manners and personalities, who are ready frequently to make small sacrifices, and, under exceptional circumstances, perhaps even the greatest, but on whom you dare not count in the day of your own great extremity, any more than they can count on themselves in their own day of decision. In that dread day, if their character is put to the test, they will in all likelihood sell their divine birthright for a mess of pottage. Besides, much of the apparent goodness of such Esaus is simply constitutional or hereditary. It has become theirs through no effort of their own, but simply through the happy fortune of a good ancestry, or a good digestion, or a good environment. Where their goodness is *true* goodness but limited to some narrow sphere of activity or sporadic in its exercise, there has been some arrest in their moral development: else this goodness would never have left off growing. Thus the first class embraces not only the men who are

thoroughly selfish and are quite ready to sacrifice their own people, their friends and country, in order to save themselves, but also the men who under exceptional circumstances on some clear and urgent call of duty are ready to give themselves up for family, friend, or country, and yet on the ordinary occasions of life are often too ready—nay more, are accustomed—to sacrifice the higher for the lower end.

The fact, however, that they can forget and sacrifice themselves on certain great emergencies shows that they have within them possibilities and potentialities of the higher life, which are only waiting to be awaked through some unexpected visitation or summons of God's Spirit.

But though there are great diversities of character in this class, its members agree in this that, whether they are among the ambitious and successful ones of the world, or are mere earners of their daily bread, aiming at nothing beyond the fulfilment of the day's routine, whether they are contented or discontented with their lot, they all alike ignore the fact, or else are ignorant, that there is a blessedness that transcends their highest desires and transcends them in an infinite degree. Their outlook is confined to this world: they seem to have no interest that travels beyond it, no aim outreaching its utmost horizons. They find in it so much interest and satisfaction, such an ample response to their desires and ambitions, that you cannot imagine them as desiring something better or higher, or even as speculating whether there is anything higher and better than what they already know and have made their own, or are seeking to make their own. These are the typical muck-rakers in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Suddenly in the midst of such purely earthly pursuits the vision of a higher life bursts upon them unexpectedly, and then, if they are willing to make the needful response, or, to use the words of the parable, to sell all that they have to buy the heavenly treasure, Christ is truly found of them—found of them though they had sought Him not.

Let us now turn to the second class, who are represented in the second parable by a merchant seeking goodly pearls. Unlike the first class, the members of this class refuse to be satisfied with such things as they at present possess. Employ themselves as they may in the quest of the good things of this world, they have barely made them

their own when the spirit within them discounts their value, and so they strike their tents anew and resume their lifelong quest. They regard physical health, good education, and the respect of their fellow-men as goodly pearls, but they cannot rest satisfied with these. They will have nothing short of the best, and so they make one acquisition after another. They may be far from blameless, but since the prevailing note in their conduct is their discontent with their present achievement and their resolve to better it, the redemption of their entire nature sooner or later is assured. They may desire money, but soon they recognize that knowledge is better, and so they part with the one to get the other. If the alternative of large means or large knowledge is presented to them, then they close at once with the more exacting claims of knowledge. The esteem and approbation of their neighbours are good and much to be desired, but self-respect and an unstained conscience are much better. And so they go forward, ever seeking some other good that transcends the best they have. With Rabbi ben Ezra in Browning's poem their deepest conviction is—'the best is yet to be,' and, finally, that best they find in the knowledge of Christ.

But though the lower object has to be abandoned in order to secure the higher, the lower object is in reality not lost to the man who forsakes it at the call of the higher. In fact, the forsaking of the lower object in obedience to a higher aim is found on experience to be the very condition for securing the lower. Just as the thoroughgoing self-seeker in his base pursuit loses his heart and soul and all his best faculties and ultimately the things themselves for which he sacrificed them, so the self-surrendered soul recovers in glorified form the very blessings he had surrendered.

His discovery of the truth of all truths does not lower the value of other forms of truth. Rather it gives them a greater value, and, even if his pursuit of them has to be abandoned for a time at the summons of truth in its highest form, yet the surrender is but temporary, and their attainment sooner or later assured. Having sought first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, he finds that all things else are in due course added unto him.

There is one more point which should be carefully observed, and this is the different tenses used in describing the action of the two men after their

discovery of their respective treasures. Of the merchant it is said, 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant seeking goodly pearls : and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.' The sale of all that he had and the purchase of the pearl of great price follows *immediately* on its discovery. There is not a moment's delay in the whole transaction. That this is the idea intended, a comparison of the language used in the first parable affords further evidence. According to it, 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in the field ; which a man found, and hid ; and in his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.' Here we observe that our Lord says 'goeth and selleth and buyeth'<sup>1</sup> over against 'went and sold and bought.'

<sup>1</sup>These are historic presents. On this point all scholars are agreed. But, strangely enough, commentators hold that in this passage they are used merely to give vividness to the narrative, and their use here is therefore simply of a dramatic character. They require the reader or hearer to take his stand in the midst of the drama described. Blass, in his earlier edition, considers that such historical presents 'habitually take an aoristic meaning.' But in the fourth edition (edited by Debrunner, 1913), p. 186, it is only claimed that this is mostly the case. The historic present can also have a durative force (see Robertson, *Grammar*, p. 867), and this is the meaning that the context supports in Mt 13<sup>44</sup>: *ὕπαγει . . . πωλεῖ . . . ἀγοράζει* — 'goeth—selleth—buyeth,' or 'keeps going—keeps selling—keeps buying.' For these are not used simply to impart vividness to the narrative, but to express the ethical difference in the character of the two classes of men described in the two parables.

There is, however, a difficulty to be explained here. Seeing that Mark in his general narrative uses the historic present 151 times and not once in the parables he recounts, can we rely on the originality of these historic presents in Matthew? I think we can do so without hesitation on the following grounds. (1) Since Matthew systematically eliminates the historic presents in the passages common to Mark and himself—88 times out of 110—it is clear that he does not like them, and therefore it is not likely that he would alter aorists in his sources into historic presents. (2) But it may be urged that this historic present does occur in Matthew 93 times. That is true, but 68 of these are *λέγει, λέγουσιν, φησίν*. Moreover, if he had used the historic present relatively as often as Mark, it would have occurred 244 times instead of 93. The appearance, therefore, of this present in passages derived from sources is good evidence that they were in those sources. (3) The historic present occurs 12 times in Matthew in parables peculiar to Matthew. Hence there is no positive evidence against their originality in his sources, whereas there is evidence in their favour, seeing that Matthew's

Now the usual, and, as far as I am aware, universal, explanation of the present tenses in this parable over against the aorists in the second parable is that the Speaker uses here historic presents merely to give vividness to the story. But I am convinced that the use of the presents here is due not to the dramatic character of style, but to psychological grounds. Rightly understood, therefore, the presents here are what grammarians call durative, not dramatic : they are not used to give vividness to the narrative, but to represent continuous and sustained action. In the case of the finders of the hid treasure it is a long process and one not capable of immediate dispatch.

Thus these different tenses bring out a specific difference between the two classes. Though the first class may on minor and isolated occasions not only show a willingness to surrender the lower aim for the higher, but actually in some instances or departments of action do so, yet such conduct is not habitual with them : it is not the ideal they set before them : much less do they attempt it in practice. On the other hand, the ideal of the second class is to make this surrender and, when they fall short of it in practice, as they no doubt frequently do, they are overwhelmed with shame and self-reproach and give themselves anew to their task with purer aims and fuller devotion. Hence it follows that when the occasion arises for the supreme surrender they do not find the difficulty in making that surrender that the first class do. To make such surrenders on the lower levels of life has become habitual to them, and so, when the supreme summons comes, they can make the surrender more or less in its completeness from the centre of their being to its circumference.

Thus the past character of the seekers after goodly pearls furthers their spiritual activities, and makes the process of their spiritual transformation a task of speedier accomplishment ; whereas the past character of the finders of the hid treasure hampers their spiritual activities and makes the process of their spiritual transformation a task

tendency would be to replace them by aorists. (4) But the evidence is still stronger if we take Luke into account. Luke positively avoids the historic present. If he had used it relatively as often as Mark, he would have done so 257 times, but he admits it into his text only 9 (or 11) times. And of these 9 times, 5 occur in parables peculiar to Luke. Hence the occurrence of the historic present in the original sources of some of the parables is well attested.

calling for time and prolonged effort. It is true that the latter may just as faithfully and as wholly surrender their hearts to God as do the seekers after the goodly pearls, but such surrender cannot at once transform their character; for that character is the creation of years, it may be of a lifetime, the product of a variety of impulses, thoughts, desires, actions, habits, which as a rule have not risen above material standards or self-regarding ambitions. Hence, though in the crisis of conversion their souls are brought into actual communion with Christ, it is only gradually that their habitual thoughts, desires, activities, and habits can be brought into complete subjection to His will. Therefore it is that our Lord says in the parable, 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in the field; which a man found and hid; and in his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field,' or better, 'keeps going and keeps selling all that he hath, and keeps buying that field.' His soul's aim is transformed, but it may take a long time to transform his life and character. At the crisis of conversion the character of the finder of the hid treasure is generally wholly unlike that which it should be. Though in his soul and aspirations he has in a real sense died to sin and risen to righteousness, the task of transforming his character is one that requires faith and constancy

and time. Since the new life is a growth, and often a very slow growth, the difference to the outward observer between the old life and the new may be hardly perceptible. And yet as to inward principle the two lives are poles asunder.

In conclusion, and herein I would address more especially those who are dissatisfied with their present lives, and are seeking—whether it be only now and again, or with sustained purpose, like the seeker after goodly pearls—for the blessedness that is offered to all the souls of men. To such I would say never give up the quest, however often you fail. We are not made for final discomfiture but for victory, and that in the highest of all things. This blessedness is in store for us, if we are but steadfast to make it our own. No true effort in this quest, despite repeated failure, is ever lost. To this conviction let us be true alike for ourselves and for those who call us friends, and under no lure of gain or pleasure, no stress of difficulty or defeat, ever relinquish it. The quest will not be fruitless either for ourselves or others. If we seek, the Master assures us, we shall find. The only essential difference between the man who finds and the man who does not find is just this, that, whereas the latter after one or more failures gives up the quest in despair, the other, however often he fails, pursues it till he finds.

## Is Human Nature Mean or Great?

BY THE REVEREND J. D. JONES, D.D., BOURNEMOUTH.

'And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?'—Jn 1<sup>46</sup>.

BEYOND reading my text I am going to say practically nothing about it. It is the difficulty suggested by the question which is going to be my real theme. Philip had just announced to his friend Nathanael that they had found the prophesied and long-expected Messiah in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Nazareth was Nathanael's difficulty. There is no need to say, as some of the older commentators said, that Nazareth was a small town of specially evil reputation. It is sufficient to say that it was a poor and insignificant little village never once mentioned in the Old Testament. Galilean though

he was, Nathanael could not believe that Messiah could issue from such a home as that—that One so great could have so lowly and even mean an origin. Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?

Now it is not of Jesus and His lowly origin that I want to speak, but of man and his beginnings. For that is what great multitudes of people are thinking and saying about *man* in these days of ours. They are thinking and saying it by way of excuse and apology for the evil he does. They are saying, Can anything good come out of a creature that has had so base and mean an origin as man? Have we any right to expect it? Are not his