

Rise Up And Build

"So They said, 'Let us rise up and build,' Then they set their hands to do this good work," Neh. 2:18

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The Pearl of Great Price

*"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant man seeking beautiful pearls, Who, when he found one **pearl of great price**, went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matt. 13:45-46).*

These verses contain the parable which is known as the parable of the pearl of great price. Jesus, Who has appropriately been referred to as "the Master Teacher," often taught in parables. The word "parable" is translated from *parabole* (Greek), which "signifies a placing of one thing beside another with a view to comparison" (Vine, **Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words**). In fact, in Matthew chapter 13 seven parables are presented. Herein the Lord cited: the parable of the sower (vs. 3-9), the parable of the tares (v. 24-30), the parable of the mustard seed (v. 31-32), the parable of the hidden treasure (V. 44), the parable of the pearl of great price (v. 45-46), and the parable of the fish net (v. 47-50).

That a parable "signifies the placing of one thing beside another with a view to comparison" (Vine) is documented by the fact that of the seven parables presented in Matthew 13 six of them begin with the words "*the kingdom of heaven is like,*" and then the Lord stated that to which "*the kingdom of heaven*" is likened (v. 24,31,33,44,45,47).

Inasmuch as "*the kingdom of heaven*" is the subject of these parables," then in order to properly grasp and appreciate the meaning of these parables we must be able to identify what the kingdom is, and its nature.

A study of the preaching of John the Baptist, of Jesus Christ, the 70 whom Jesus sent out, and that of the twelve apostles reveals the fact that "*the kingdom of heaven*" constituted a large part of the subject matter of their preaching. Illustrating this point, we note Matt. 3:1,2 wherein we learn that John the Baptist "*came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" According to Matt. 4:11, "*from that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" According to Luke 10 Jesus "*appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two,*" with the charge to "*heal the sick there, and say to them, the kingdom of God has come near to you*" (v. 1,9). From Matt. 10:6,7 we learn that Jesus commanded the twelve apostles to go "*to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and as you go, preach, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" Summing up the persons mentioned in these verses, we discover that some 84 preachers by the authority of God

almighty in the first century preached that the kingdom of heaven (at that time) was “*at hand*,” an expression suggesting that “*the kingdom of heaven*” was about to come into existence; at that point in time it was “*at hand*.”

But how close “*at hand*” was it? In Mark 9:1 Jesus said to the people in His audience then that “*there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power*.” This verse does not tell us exactly when the kingdom of heaven was to begin, but it does let us know that it would come into existence in the life time of some who heard Jesus preach! This puts Jesus (and the other 83 preachers already cited) at odds with many modern preachers who confidently affirm that the kingdom of heaven has **not yet** come into existence and that it will not come into existence until Jesus returns the second time! Obviously then, if the kingdom has not yet come into existence, then we must conclude: (1) that Jesus was either lying, or (2) that somewhere on earth there are people still living, people who are over 1900 years old!

But getting back to Mark 9:1, we also learn therein that the kingdom was to come “*with power*.” Hence, if we can learn when the “*power*” came, then we will know when the “*kingdom*” came into existence. And this brings us to Acts 1:8 wherein the resurrected Jesus said to His apostles, “*you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*.” From the verses that follow we discover that, after speaking these words, Jesus ascended up into heaven (v. 9), after which the apostles “*returned to Jerusalem*” (v. 12), and entered “*the upper room*” (13), where they were to “*wait for the promise of the Father*” (v. 4), the promise that they would “*be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now*” (v. 5).

Acts chapter one concludes with the apostles, in Jerusalem, waiting for the fulfillment of this “*promise*.” This brings us to Acts 2:1-4 wherein we learn that “*when the day of Pentecost had fully come*” the apostles were “*all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance*.” This particular “*Pentecost*” (elsewhere referred to as “*the feast of weeks*”) was the Pentecost following Jesus’s ascension into heaven and which, according to Old Testament teaching, occurred some 50 days after the conclusion of the Jewish Passover, a Passover Jesus observed with His disciples shortly before His crucifixion (Matt. 26:28; cf. Lev. 23:15-16).

So the Kingdom was to come “*with power*,” and the “*power*” came on the day of Pentecost, so we must conclude that **the kingdom** came into existence on the day of Pentecost. However, as we read of what happened on that day we discover that the apostles preached to the vast number of Jews then present; the hearers were pricked in the heart when they learned that the Jesus Whom they had crucified was indeed the promised Messiah of the Old Testament, and that He is the Son of God! In response to Peter’s preaching, they asked, “*what shall we do*,” and Peter replied, saying, “*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ*” (v. 38), and verse 41 reveals that “*those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them*.” And, according to verse 47, these constituted the “*saved*” whom “*the Lord added to the church*.”

Please note that “the kingdom” was to come “*with power*” (Mark 9:1), the “*power*” was to come when they (the apostles) received the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), which they received on “*the day of Pentecost*” (Acts 2:1-4), and that on that day the “*saved*” were *added to the church*” (v. 47). This verse says “*church*,” it does not say “*kingdom*!” However, this does not pose a problem, for we learn from Matt. 16:18-19 that Jesus used the words “*church*” and “*kingdom*” to refer to one and the same thing. This becomes especially evident when we study Colossians

chapter one wherein we learn that they who are members of ‘*the body **the church***’ of which Jesus is the ‘*head*’ have been ‘*conveyed...into **the kingdom** of the Son of His love*’ (v. 13,18). The saints at Colossae were **in** the kingdom, but they could not have been ‘*conveyed..into the kingdom*’ if the kingdom did not then exist!

So ‘*the kingdom of heaven*’ and the church Jesus purchased with His blood encompass the same people — people who have been ‘*born of water and the Spirit,*’ a birth which Jesus said grants one entrance into ‘*the kingdom of God,*’ John 3:1-5.

This (at last!) brings us back to Matt. 13:45-46 wherein Jesus likened ‘*the kingdom of heaven*’ to a man seeking beautiful pearls, who, having found ‘*one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.*’ Herein we note the seeking merchant; he was able to discern values, he could discriminate between the good, better, and best, and when he found the pearl, the ‘*one pearl of great price,*’ he ‘*went and sold all that he had and bought it.*’ He did not wait. He acted immediately. This ‘*one pearl*’ was expensive; to obtain it, the seeking merchant ‘*sold all that he had.*’ In his mind, he **had** to have that ‘*one pearl,*’ and he could not wait; it was that important to him! But why, we ask, is that ‘*one pearl*’ so precious? The answer becomes more evident when we remember that ‘*the **kingdom** of heaven*’ (which is like a merchant man seeking beautiful pearls,” Matt. 13:45-46), when we understand that ‘*the kingdom of heaven*’ and **the church** Jesus built are one and the same (Matt. 16:18-19), that therein one is reconciled to God (Eph. 2:16), that those who enjoy this ‘*in Christ*’ relationship are recipients of ‘*all spiritual blessings*’ (Eph. 1:3), that they are ‘*heirs of God and joint heirs*’ with Jesus (Rom. 8:17), that they live ‘*in hope of eternal life*’ (Tit. 1:2), and that awaiting them is ‘*an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for*’ them (I Pet. 1:4)! This kingdom cost God His Son (John 3:16); it cost Jesus His blood (Acts 20:28), and it demands that we put God ‘*first*’ (Matt. 6:33); God will not accept second place! But think of its value — forgiveness of sins, peace of mind, the hope of eternal life, and some day a glorious entrance into that heavenly city, which is blessed with the presence of God, a place void of pain, death, tears, sorrow and crying, and wherein we can eat eternally of the tree of life, drink the water of life, and bask eternally in the sunlight of God’s abounding love!

Friend, are **you** seeking the Pearl of Great Price? If not, why not?

*** —B. Witherington