

# The Treasure in the Field

Digging to discover the Kingdom of God

Brian Watts



IMOGEN



## **The Treasure in the Field**

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Some of this material is also available on the Internet. It can be accessed at:  
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**I**t has been said that every author must have a good imagination – he must be able to imagine that people will want to read what he has written! In the case of “The Treasure in the Field”, this fertile imagination has been encouraged by some who have heard the material being taught. It is in response to their promptings that the author has worked the material into this present form.

Thanks are due to the elders of Basingstoke Community Church who released me to prepare a series of teachings on the Kingdom of God in 1984. “The Treasure in the Field” grew out of that study. Then I am grateful to the Langley Covenant Community Church for their input and support as together for the last ten years we have been trying to understand the implications of Jesus’ command to “Seek first the Kingdom of God.” I also appreciate the encouragement and insight I have received from Barney Coombs, both in the writing process and in the wider responsibilities of ministry.

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Finally, I acknowledge with gratitude the skill and enthusiasm with which Peter and Liz Mitchell prepared the book for printing. They exemplify the thesis of the book as they seek to apply the Kingdom of God to the realities of life – both in the church and in the workplace.

Brian Watts

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# Foreword

The *Treasure in the Field* is written for those who have a desire to understand the teaching of the Bible concerning the Kingdom of God and a willingness to apply the Bible to present practical realities.

In Part I, the claims of the king are presented in such a way as to call for a response of obedience. In Part II, the promises of the kingdom are presented so as to encourage faith.

On a foundation of faith and obedience, Part III attempts to show that the message of the kingdom has practical relevance for every area of life. The chapters are not exhaustive, but merely illustrate specific applications.

The book concludes in Part IV with a call to relate the message of the kingdom to everyday life, and to bring all things into submission to the King.



## Introduction

# The Kingdom Here and Now

**M**uriel Light is caught in the middle of a legal battle. Her late husband paid \$800 in 1967 for a rusty pile of junk, and she does not want anybody else getting their hands on it. Why would she go to the huge expense of legal costs to protect such a dilapidated heap? Because the junk is the ill-fated Cunard liner, the Lusitania, lying on its side on the ocean bed just off the coast of southern Ireland. The 32,000-ton vessel has lain there since it was sunk by a German torpedo in 1915. Muriel Light's husband bought it from the ship's insurers because there were reports of a trove of treasure on board. What seems to some to be no more than a pile of junk, becomes a matter of great urgency to others who get a whiff of the scent of treasure.

Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is like treasure hidden in a field (Mt 13:44). The discovery of that treasure totally changed the life of the man who found it. He was more than happy to sell all he had to buy that field. Such a man must have wondered why nobody had stumbled across the treasure before. People had walked through the field, farmers had ploughed the field, and yet for years the treasure remained undiscovered. Somebody must have deliberately hidden it, and there it had lain, buried.

The Kingdom of God is hidden in such a way that men may spend their lives walking all over it, but never knowing it is there. So, in spite

his heart, and one which the Father would fulfil, was that God's Kingdom would come. His next request showed how he saw that desire coming true. He prayed, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10). The coming of the kingdom entails the rule of heaven being seen in the realm of earth.

## The Treasure Hunt

When my children were younger, we had a family tradition. If ever my work took me away from home for more than a few days, I wanted to leave the children something to remind them of their father. So I left them a treasure hunt. After my departure, there would be an envelope for each of them to open, containing the first clue. If they solved the riddle, it would lead them to another clue hidden somewhere in the house. When the trail was successfully concluded, a pile of goodies would be discovered - candies or some other small present to enjoy while I was away. It was usually wise to make sure my wife was aware of the final location of the treasure in case the clues proved to be too complex for their young minds!

Many who have embarked on the treasure hunt, seeking to discover the kingdom, have been put off the trail very early on. Some of the clues seem rather cryptic. Others initially appear confusing. For example, Mark and Luke speak of the Kingdom of God in their gospels, but Matthew refers mostly to the Kingdom of heaven. Some have regarded the two terms as referring to different things. But often they appear in parallel passages where different gospel writers are clearly quoting the same statement by Jesus.

Actually the two phrases describe the same thing. But there is a very good reason why Matthew uses a different title. He was a Jew, writing to Jews. Devout Jews, out of reverence to God, were unwilling to take the name of God on their lips. They would try to find some alternative word to use.

So, for example, the Prodigal Son confesses to his father, "I have sinned against heaven and against you" (Lk 15:18). Of course, he meant

of the fact that the kingdom was one of the central themes of Jesus' teaching, two thousand years later the church remains divided about what he meant. She certainly does not seem to have discovered the kingdom with the excitement which characterizes the man in the parable.

### **What is the Kingdom?**

So what is the Kingdom of God? Defined simply, it is God's government. The word "kingdom" has two aspects: realm and rule. Our understanding of the Kingdom of God must be broad enough to embrace both meanings.

Firstly, the Kingdom of God is the realm, or the domain, over which God's government is exercised. It is similar to the designation of the United Kingdom as being the territory ruled by Queen Elizabeth.

Secondly, kingdom refers to rule, or dominion. It is not only a territorial definition, for it also describes God's activity in governing. It includes the concept of rule as well as realm; of dominion as well as domain. Kingdom is an active word as well as a passive one, for it portrays what God does as well as depicting the areas over which he does it.

So when Jesus arrived on the earth proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, he was declaring new revelation about God's activity in the lives of men and women. When he said that the Kingdom of God was at hand, he was telling people that the government of God was being exercised, intervening in the affairs of men in a new way.

If men wanted proof that such government was real, Jesus pointed to the demons being cast out wherever he went. He said, "If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come to you" (Lk 11:20). The demons' departure demonstrated the breaking in of a new sovereignty. Jesus stressed that the kingdom was at hand. Its nearness was clear for all to see. It is a rule which is being revealed on earth. The essence of the dominion may be heavenly, but the nature of the domain is certainly earthly.

When Jesus taught his disciples what we have called the Lord's Prayer, he declared an important truth about the kingdom. The desire of

priority in their lives. They will pay whatever price is necessary. Jesus said to such people, the Father “has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Lk 12:32-34). The treasures of the sunken Lusitania will only go to those who are prepared to pay the price to retrieve them; the same is true of the kingdom.

That is why Jesus says that the kingdom is like treasure hidden in a field. Even the most sincere people can walk right by and miss it, with no idea of what is buried beneath their feet. Some of the clues in this great treasure hunt have often been misunderstood: people have been looking in the wrong place.

### Clue #1 - “Now”

The first surprising thing about these clues is that the kingdom is HIDDEN IN THE PRESENT. Many have been looking for it in the future. In one sense that is a correct expectation, for Jesus certainly spoke in futuristic terms about the kingdom. For example when he taught the parables of the ten virgins and of the talents (Mt 25:1-30), he started by saying, “At that time, the kingdom of heaven *will be* like...” The time to which he was referring was clearly the second coming of the King in power, for that is the subject of the previous chapter.

Here, then, Jesus is speaking of the kingdom in a future sense, of what the kingdom will be like. But even in these parables, the weight of Jesus’ message is on the present rather than the future. He speaks of what we should be doing now (i.e. make sure that we are filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit and make the most of the talents that have been entrusted to us) in the light of this revelation of the future.

However, while there is clearly an important futuristic element in the revelation concerning the kingdom, most of the parables of the kingdom do not begin: “The Kingdom of God will be like...” They start: “The Kingdom of God is like...” The good news that Jesus proclaimed is that the kingdom to which the prophets looked forward had become a present reality in Jesus. For those who have eyes to see it, the treasure is

that he had sinned against God and his father, but he adopted a common euphemism by saying “heaven” so as to not have to say “God.” In deference to such Jewish sensitivities, Matthew does exactly the same throughout most of his gospel. He says “Kingdom of Heaven”; but it is just a different way of saying the Kingdom of God.

However, in spite of this simple explanation, many have been put off the trail by misunderstanding Matthew’s terminology. Such frequent use of the word “heaven” in association with the kingdom has led many to regard heaven as the primary meaning of the kingdom. The Kingdom of God has come to be thought of as being of other worlds and after this life. So there are a lot of treasure hunters looking in the wrong place!

Of course there is much in the teaching of Jesus to indicate that his kingdom is “not of this world” (Jn 18:36); by which he meant, in context, that the source of his authority was not human delegation (as Pilate’s was), but divine appointment. Also, there is much concerning the kingdom for which fulfilment can only come with the personal return of the King.

Nonetheless, the good news which Jesus proclaimed is not restricted to the heavenly realms or the distant future. His message was that the kingdom is at hand. The heavenly reality is now being experienced on earth, for “the Kingdom of God is among you” (Lk 17:21). The anticipated reign of God is now being experienced in the affairs of men, for the kingdom HAS COME (Mt 12:28). Despite Matthew’s use of the word heaven, the kingdom has much of a “here and now” flavour to it in the teaching of Jesus.

In these references which say that the kingdom “is among you,” and “has come,” we have some very important clues in our treasure hunt. One of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God is that God has hidden it, and yet he wants us to find it. That is why the great priority in life must always be to seek the kingdom (Mt 6:33). God has hidden it in this way because it is not good, in Jesus’ words, to “throw your pearls to pigs” (Mt 7:6). That is to say, do not give anything precious to those who will not value it.

The kingdom will only be discovered by those who show that they really appreciate its value by the way in which they seek it as the first

one who had conquered the world. The heavenly proclamation was that “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Rev 11:15).

While the ultimate fulfilment of that remains in the future, the fact remains that the coming of the kingdom is inextricably tied up with the world. God’s government does not only have to be operative within the church; his will is to be done on earth as it is in heaven. It has implications for politics, economics, medicine, industrial relations, education – and every other sphere on earth as well as ecclesiology. Our treasure hunt searching for the Kingdom of God will take us into realms such as these.

### Found - Here and Now

We have seen that the parable of the treasure gives us important clues about where the kingdom is hidden – hidden in unexpected places like the present and the world. But the parable also tells us that the treasure **MAY BE FOUND**. It may be found in the present and in the world. The kingdom is in the “here and now” as well as in the “sweet bye and bye.”

In spite of the fact that it is hidden, God’s desire is that it should be discovered. And it will be discovered by those who look in the right place and who are willing to pay the price. The man in the parable was willing to sell everything, and he did it joyfully. The Kingdom of God, like the treasure in the field, will cost you everything; but it’s a bargain at the price!

Down through the centuries, countless men and women have been prepared to pay the price and have discovered something of the reality of the Kingdom of God in their day and in their world. They have not been content to wait for a kingdom that is solely futuristic, but they have sought, at whatever cost, to see the rule of God overflow from the church and touch their world.

Such was the motivation of the great explorer, David Livingstone. He wrote in his diary in 1852: “I will place no value on anything I have or may possess, except in relation to the kingdom of Christ. If anything will

hidden in the present.

## Clue #2 - “Here”

The second surprising thing about these early clues is that the kingdom is HIDDEN IN THE WORLD. Most people have looked for the kingdom as something locked up behind the doors of the church. When Jesus speaks of the treasure, he describes it as being hidden in a field. Three of the previous parables in the context of Matthew 13 also speak of fields, and there Jesus tells us what the field represents. He tells us in verse 38, “The field is the world.”

In the parable of the sower, the field represents the heart of one who hears the word. But then we find that as the chapter proceeds, the metaphor changes. Those who respond with faith toward the word in turn become the seed. The sons of the kingdom are then planted in the field (v.38). The message of the kingdom takes root in men’s hearts, and it is then planted in the world in a flesh and blood form in those responsive lives. So it is in the field, which is the world, where the kingdom will be found.

Too many people have stopped looking for the kingdom because they have found the church. But the church is not the sum total of the kingdom; the church is the agent of the kingdom. It is to the church that Jesus has given the keys of the kingdom. She has been given the authority to bind and loose, to pronounce and effect the government of heaven on earth. The church is not synonymous with the kingdom; rather she is to be the instrument through which the world can begin to see God’s kingdom.

It takes eyes of faith to see the kingdom hidden in the world. Some of Jesus’ parables (like those of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast) were spoken to build such faith. But if we look for anything less than the Kingdom of God being discovered in the world, we undervalue the power of what Jesus accomplished on Calvary. The revelation of Jesus that was given to John on Patmos, in the midst of the persecution he was suffering, was not simply of one who had redeemed the church, but of

advance the interests of that kingdom it shall be given away or kept, only by giving away or keeping it I shall most promote the glory of him to whom I owe all my hopes in time and eternity.”<sup>1</sup>

Exploration was not his goal when he began to open up the interior of the African continent. Livingstone’s driving ambition was to see something of the Kingdom of God established in his day in the world.

Too often our heavenly-minded concept of the kingdom has paralysed the church into waiting for Jesus to come to do that which he has told us to do. It is we who are to go into all the world and make disciples of all the nations. To seek the Kingdom of God is not to sit back and wait for heaven. As Samuel Rutherford wrote in 1640: “I shall be glad to be a witness to behold the kingdoms of the world become Christ’s. I could stay out of heaven many years to see that victorious triumphing Lord act that prophesied part of his soul-conquering love.”<sup>2</sup>

Such a hope of Jesus’ victory on earth should fire the church into action. If the church has faith in such a hope, she will no longer need to be preoccupied with speculations concerning the future, but will seek to fulfil her destiny: to see the Kingdom of God coming into the world. It is with vision like this that we embark upon the search for the treasure in the field. We will find that our search will be costly; but what cost can compare with the glory of finding the Kingdom of God? As we discover the treasure, we shall be able, by the Spirit, to put our lives under the government of God, and then in turn to be instruments of his rule in the world.

#### FOOTNOTES

1 Iain Murray: *The Puritan Hope*, p.172 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust; 1975)

2 Quoted by Murray; *op cit* p.53