

DOUG NEWTON

FRESH

EYES

ON

JESUS'

PARABLES



*Discovering New Insights in Familiar Passages*

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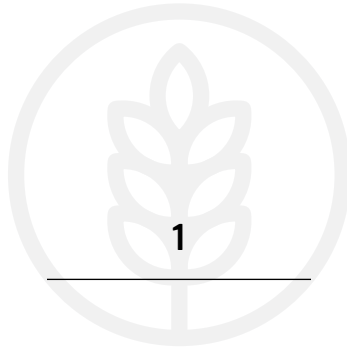
*Discovering New Insights in Familiar Passages*

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# “HELLO, TURKEY”

*The Hidden Treasure*

*Matthew 13:44*

How can one little Bible verse capture  
the full meaning of salvation?

I grew up well before the era of iPads. The closest thing we had to an attention-grabbing flat-screen instrument was an Etch A Sketch. Remember? You drew on it by turning two knobs that moved an interior stylus against the backside of a gray screen, leaving a black line. If you got good at it, you could draw almost anything, and then you simply erased the screen and started over by turning it upside down and shaking it vigorously.

This is similar to what we often must do with our minds in order to see something new or even better in a familiar Scripture passage. Case in point: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field” (Matt. 13:44).

One common interpretation has been “Etch A Sketched” into our minds by preachers dialing in this point: the kingdom of heaven is such a precious treasure that we, like the man, should give up everything to lay hold of it. Of course, that’s absolutely true—but probably not what Jesus was talking about. So let’s flip our minds upside down, shake out the old teaching,

and ask the Holy Spirit to help us discover something new. Let's start with a quick review of the facts:

- *What did the man buy?* Don't say "treasure." He wanted the treasure, but he had to buy the field where he found it in order to possess the treasure. That's an important observation.
- *How did the man come up with the money to buy the field?* He sold everything he owned.
- *What was his frame of mind while doing that?* He was joyful.
- *Finally, what was the kingdom of heaven like?* Wait ... don't say "treasure." The first thing you must do whenever you approach a parable that begins "the kingdom of heaven (or God) is like ..." is to put the parable's elements inside a parenthesis so the phrase "kingdom of heaven" applies to everything that follows. This parable is not saying the kingdom of God is like any *one* element in the parable, such as the treasure or the man or the field. Rather, the parable is saying the whole picture that follows is what the kingdom of God

is like. That is, the man finds treasure, hides it, joyfully sells everything, and buys the field. Given that basic rule of interpretation, we cannot interpret this parable the common way—that the kingdom of God should be like a treasure to us.

You might then be tempted to ask, “So what is this parable telling us to value so highly that we would give up everything to obtain it?” Here’s the bad news. If you ask the question that way, you’ll never arrive at the answer, because too often we don’t notice any unwarranted assumptions we make. Let me demonstrate by telling you a story.

For more than thirty years, I have asked groups to solve the following “twenty-questions mystery”: Mary lies dead on the floor. Tom is asleep on the couch. A colorless, odorless liquid surrounds Mary’s body, and broken pieces of glass are also scattered around her. The windows and doors are all locked from the inside. What happened?

The groups always start out with the same kinds of questions. Someone asks, “Has Mary been dead a long time?”

“No, but that’s not relevant to the solution,” I reply.

Another person asks, “The windows may be locked, but are any of them broken?”

“Clever question. But no, none of them are broken.”

“Is the liquid water?”

“Yes.”

“Did Mary drop the glass before she died, because she got frightened?”

“No,” I say. “But you’re making an unwarranted assumption.”

Eyes squint and brows furrow. Questions fly: “Is it really a house?” “Is Tom really asleep?”

“Yes,” I say, “but go beyond the facts you were presented with. Who are you assuming Mary is?”

A nurse? A murderer? A thief? Eventually someone hits on it: “Is Mary a woman?”

“No.” I see the light turn on.

“A little girl?”

“No.”

“Is Mary human?”

“No.” And there it is.

From this point, the solution comes quickly: Tom is a cat. Mary is a goldfish. Tom knocked the fishbowl off the table, it broke, and Mary died.

In the same way, our unwarranted assumption about “the man” in this parable keeps us from understanding what Jesus was teaching about God’s kingdom. Here’s your hint: Who are you assuming the main character to be? What if the man who bought the field is not an ordinary human being like us but the Son of God?



## CHRISTUS VICTOR

What if this isn't a parable about all we must do to possess the kingdom? What if Jesus is the one who finds the treasure? What if we human beings are the treasure? What if the field is this world that belonged to Satan, the former prince of the world? And what if it is Jesus who gives up everything He owns to purchase (redeem) this world and reclaim us as His possession? What if that's what the kingdom of heaven is like?

Did you realize that for the first thousand years of Christendom that picture was likely the more common way of understanding salvation? It is sometimes called *Christus Victor*. Today the common view is *penal substitution*: that is, Jesus died in our place to pay for our sins. This view of salvation has its roots in a classic atonement theory Saint Anselm articulated in the eleventh century. After various revisions following the Protestant Reformation, it has become the dominant view of salvation. It's not that Christus Victor is right and penal substitution is wrong. They simply represent different ways of looking at the gospel. God's work of salvation is so great (Heb. 2:3), like a huge mountain, that we must view it from many angles to gain an accurate and comprehensive picture. But most Christians don't realize this and believe there is only one way to describe what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

You could summarize the Christus Victor view of salvation this way: the prince of the world, Satan, possessed this world; the Son of God came to earth and defeated him on the cross, then established and commissioned the church to enforce His kingdom's rule on earth and reclaim lost people to His possession. That used to be a more common way to understand the gospel of salvation.

When I first viewed this parable from that angle, my whole idea of salvation expanded. However, I sensed the change was so big, it was important to check my new insight against Scripture. When I did, this short parable seemed to condense several verses about Jesus' death found in Hebrews and Paul's letters:

1. ... *then in his joy went*—"For the joy set before him he endured the cross ..." (Heb. 12:2).
2. ... *and sold all he had*—" [He] did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing ..." (Phil. 2:6-7).
3. ... *and bought that field*—"You are not your own; you were bought at a price" (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

So my new insight checked out. As a result, I now believe penal substitution is one way to understand the gospel, but

Christus Victor is also, and it may be the most glorious understanding we have. The King of the universe reclaimed this fallen world. Isn't that exactly what Handel wrote in his celebrated “Hallelujah Chorus”?

The kingdom of this world  
Is become the kingdom of our Lord  
And of His Christ, and of His Christ;  
and He shall reign for ever and ever.<sup>1</sup>

Plus, rethinking my assumptions about this parable not only resized my view of salvation but also upsized my longing to join the Lord in His treasure-seeking work. For this parable reveals our Lord's passion to reclaim us—you and me—as treasures that belong to Him. It tells of the lengths to which He will go to make a person—any person—His.

## HOW FAR JESUS GOES

A couple years ago after church, a somewhat-unkept and heavily tattooed young mom came up to me and my wife after having waited for people to clear out. Unfamiliar with church lingo and protocol, she asked cautiously, “You know your talk today?” (She didn't call it a sermon.) “Why did you look toward me and say ‘Hello, Turkey?’”

I had no clue what she was talking about. I felt sure I never said such a thing. My wife's quizzical look confirmed my doubts. I just replied, "I don't remember saying that. Why do you ask?" That triggered a somewhat-lengthy description of her troubled life but how, through her ups and downs with drugs and lovers leaving her with children, she had a loving grandmother.

She went on to explain, "Grandma was someone who went to church a lot, and she prayed a lot, and I knew she loved me, but I was messed up. Last year my grandma died, but I got to see her before, and I said, 'Grandma, if I ever get back on the right track and you can see me from heaven making good choices, will you somehow tell me "Hello, Turkey"?' That's what she always used to call me. Well, this is my second week coming here to church, and this morning I clearly heard you say 'Hello, Turkey.' So I'm thinking I must be on the right track."

Her story struck me, and I told her how much God loved her and said, "Jesus knew what you asked your grandma to say. So He caused you to hear words this morning that I didn't say."

She was dumbfounded. And I was able to introduce her to this Jesus who does remarkable, miraculous things to seek and save the lost—to claim the buried treasures of this world. That's who Jesus is. That's what this parable is about. Our Lord looks at each of us as a treasure, and He will stop at nothing—pay whatever price is necessary—to help you become His possession!

Here's my suggestion: the next time you take Communion, don't think just about how much Jesus paid. Yes, it was His

life He gave—it was His body that was broken and His blood that was shed. But consider *why* He paid that price. He wants you to be His. He wants you to no longer be in any kind of bondage to any form of the Enemy’s power. Satan has no hold on you. He has no claim on you.

Turns out you are an Etch A Sketch yourself. When you become His, Jesus wonderfully and lovingly turns your life upside down and erases the sin, shame, corruption, and marks the Devil left in your life, granting you a clean slate and heart that He writes on by His Spirit. Because you belong to Him.

## 20/20 FOCUS

1. This chapter points out that the common interpretation of this parable emphasizes the enormous price a human being must be willing to pay to possess the treasured kingdom of heaven. What difference does it make to see yourself as the treasure Jesus paid to possess, rather than the kingdom being the treasure you must pay to possess?
2. The phrase “and sold all he had” was connected with Philippians 2:6–7, which speaks of the price the Son of God paid to redeem the

world. Can you think of any other Bible verses that speak of His great personal sacrifice?

3. How might things be different in our churches and among Christian believers if the Christus Victor view of salvation was more widely proclaimed and embraced in our time?
4. Take a few moments to pray for a person you would ask Jesus to seek out and save in the miraculous way He claimed the young mom in the “Hello, Turkey” story.

*Lord Jesus, I am so thankful You paid the price to reclaim this world ... and me. I embrace by faith my freedom from sin and from Satan's hold on me. Help me walk out that freedom in practical ways that show the world I belong to You. Amen.*

## VISION CHECK

Whenever you begin to think about anything, you start with assumptions you're not even aware of. The key to clear thinking is to release those assumptions. Don't let them control what you see before you check them out like we did in this

parable. (Are we right to assume the man who bought the field is a person like ourselves?)

Practice this skill by going to 2 Corinthians 9:15, where Paul wrote, “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” First, identify what most people assume Paul meant by the “indescribable gift” and hold it in question. Then read the preceding verses (vv. 6–14) to see if the common assumption fits the context. Or is the “indescribable gift” referring to something else? Hop on [dougnewton.com](http://dougnewton.com) or the Fresh Eyes app to compare your thoughts with mine.