

“TREASURE TROVE OF TRUTH”
MATTHEW 13:51-52

I grew up in what is called the “Mother Lode Country” of California, which is located in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Coloma, where James Marshall discovered the gold that started the Gold Rush of 1849, is located just a few miles from my old stomping grounds. While working at a sawmill on the edge of the south fork of the American River, Marshall looked into the water and saw some tiny specks of what he thought might be gold. After a series of tests in Sacramento and San Francisco that proved they were, his discovery triggered an international frenzy. Thousands of men dropped what they were doing and scampered to Northern California, scouring the riverbeds in and around Coloma, hoping to strike it rich.

It was not long before some of these miners deduced that the small flecks in the streams and rivers were only the broken bits and pieces of the real source of gold. The serious wealth was not to be found on the bottom of a riverbed, but in the heart of the earth where quartz veins were located. That’s why if you were to walk through the hills and canyons in that region today you would come across countless abandoned mines where miners looked for those veins. And when you go into some of those mines (as I used to do) you cannot help but notice that finding and following those quartz veins and extracting the gold from them was incredibly hard work.

In Psalm 19 David likens the Word of God to fine gold. He says, *“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes...more to be desired are they than gold, yes than much fine gold” (19:7-10).*

Anytime you pick up your Bible and read it, you have the potential to extract some of its precious treasure. You can get *something* out of it, even with minimal effort on your part, but I would suggest, that you may only be getting “flecks of gold.” If you want to tap into serious wealth, if you want to enjoy the profound treasure of God’s wisdom, it is necessary to dig deep. You’ve got to be a serious student of Scripture—*all* Scripture. You’ve got to know Scripture well enough that you can understand the comprehensiveness of God, discern the development of His salvation story, and see how all of Scripture connects and relates to each other.

But be advised, just like mining for gold, the effort of extracting Scripture’s wealth is not easy. It is hard work. It is time-consuming. It is mentally rigorous. It requires a relentless attention to detail and a willingness to navigate complex theological and literary nuances. It demands discipline, diligence, and perseverance.

So, is it worth the effort?

Consider this: There are only two things in this world that will last forever—the souls of people and the Word of God. The prophet Isaiah said, *“All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever” (Isaiah 40:6,8).* If you want to invest your time and energy and efforts into something that is eternally consequential, the Word of God qualifies. Indeed, it is better than gold because it is *lasting* treasure.

Perhaps this is why our Lord Jesus, in speaking to His disciples whom He was training for the kingdom of heaven, likened them to privileged holders and experts of precious treasures. After telling several parables in which He introduced some surprising truths about

the kingdom, He said to them, ⁵¹ *“Have you understood all these things?” They said to Him, “Yes.”* ⁵² *And He said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”*

“All these things” in verse 51 is a reference to the things He just finished teaching them, truths He had presented in parables, truths that revealed what He earlier called, “the secrets of the kingdom” (v. 11). These truths presented several concepts that were previously unknown to the disciples. That, for example, in the kingdom in its present form good and evil will coexist. That the kingdom will start out rather inconspicuously and grow until it becomes huge. That participation in the kingdom is the most valuable thing we can have and is worth investing all our resources. And that the kingdom in this present world is building to a climax where Jesus will visibly return to this earth, separate the righteous and the unrighteous, and send them to their respective eternal destinies.

After giving the final parable of the kingdom to the disciples in this discourse, Jesus asks them, “Have you understood all these things?” They quickly and confidently replied, “Yes!” There are references later in Matthew’s Gospel suggesting that their understanding was not perfect or complete. Yet Jesus did not question or contradict their affirmative reply, which indicates that whatever uncertainty they may have had about details, they understood the main thrust of what Jesus had said.

At the very least, the disciples were growing in their understanding. So, Jesus responds to their affirmative reply with a parable about their present privileged status and their future role. Look again at **verse 52**. *“Therefore, every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”*

A scribe (grammateus) literally means “someone who writes.” But among the Jews the term evolved to mean someone who was a learner, interpreter, and teacher of the law (what we call the Old Testament). The main task of a scribe was to study and interpret Scripture. In first-century Judaism Scribes were the esteemed Bible scholars and theologians, and many were members of the Jewish council called the Sanhedrin. Unfortunately, they often clashed with Jesus because their interpretations of Scripture leaned heavily on tradition and presumption, which skewed the truth. Thus, the term “scribe” in the Gospels is mostly used in a pejorative sense for the religious elite who opposed Jesus and whose understanding of the law was shallow.

But under Jesus’ instruction His twelve disciples were becoming educated *scribes* that were being trained for the kingdom of heaven. The verb translated “has been trained” (*matheteuo*) comes from the same root as the word translated elsewhere “disciple,” and it would be perfectly appropriate to translate this verb, “has become a disciple” or “has been made a disciple.”

Please note, however, that the discipleship Jesus is emphasizing in this passage is not so much a relationship with Him (as is emphasized in other passages), but a role in the kingdom of heaven. Of course, Jesus is the King of the kingdom, so it is impossible to consider any role in the kingdom apart from a relationship with Him. But Jesus is pointing out that those, like His twelve disciples, who have been trained and educated so that they understand the truths of the kingdom, have an esteemed position in the kingdom that is extremely valuable.

He likens them to *a man who is the master of a house*—a description of someone who possesses honor and wealth. In this man’s house there are treasures, both new and old. I

would suggest to you that this treasure is God's Word, and that the *old* refers to what we now call the Old Testament. The *new* are the teachings of Jesus which clarified, expounded, and fulfilled the old. I believe Jesus was anticipating what we now call the New Testament.

By saying that this householder has in his possession both old and new treasures, Jesus is asserting that the trained disciple appreciates, values, and discerns the truth in all Scripture, so much so that He has become a sort of expert. He does not discard the old because the new is weightier or because it shines brighter. Nor does he over-emphasize the old just because it has stood the test of time. He values and discerns the truth in *both* the old and new. He can point out the relationship between the old and new. He can reconcile the apparent discrepancies between the old and new. He can hold the new next to the old and show how the old illuminates the new, and how the new illuminates the old.

And all of this points to the reason why the householder *brings out* the old and new treasures in the first place. It is not merely to admire them; it is not to appraise them; it is certainly not to boast about having them in one's possession. It is for the purpose of dispensing these treasures for the benefit of others (Wilkins, 490). It is so they can impart these truths so that others can comprehend them and take possession of them for themselves.

And this may be the first reference in the Gospels to Jesus' plan that His disciples would have a teaching ministry, and that this teaching ministry would play a significant role in the expansion of His kingdom. He said as much just before He ascended into heaven. In the same way that Jesus developed them, they are to make disciples of all the nations and teach them what they have been taught by Jesus (28:18-20). They have received treasure in the teaching of Jesus; now they are to bring it out and teach others.

What a privilege to be entrusted with this treasure! And yet what an enormous responsibility—a responsibility given not just to the Twelve, but to other followers of Jesus in every culture and generation who reside on this earth during this period of kingdom expansion. For it is Jesus' intention that this treasure be received and embraced by people from every tribe, tongue, and nation in the world.

The Apostle Paul, who was one of those entrusted with this privilege and responsibility, said it this way to the Corinthians: "We have this treasure in jars of clay" (2 Cor. 4:7)—jars of clay being a reference to our fragile human bodies. Think about this: The all-powerful, perfectly wise Son of God, who flawlessly performed His duties here on earth, who completed every assignment His Father gave Him to do, who taught with awe-inspiring power and authority, entrusted His ministry (and, by implication, His reputation) to a bunch of weak, frail, clumsy, often inept, sometimes clueless, frequently irresponsible human beings—human beings who are prone to failure and who have a penchant for misinterpreting and misspeaking.

Think of what Jesus did with His ministry. Knowing that people's eternal destinies were at stake, knowing that the progress of His message *and* kingdom was on the line, He handed it over to His disciples and said, "Here. *You* do it. I'm trusting *you* to continue what I started. I'm trusting you to dispense my treasure trove of truth."

"We have this treasure in jars of clay." A treasure that Paul called "the power of God" (Rom. 1:17)—so much power that it changes lives from the inside out. We carry in our frail bodies and hold in our feeble hands and proclaim with our faltering tongues this sin-crushing, life-changing, death-defying truth that can change the world, one precious life at a time.

This treasure is so powerful that it cannot be confined by circumstances (like the Coronavirus) or restricted by laws or overpowered by demonic forces. This treasure is the

power of God. It is an instrument in His hands to accomplish what *He* wants, *when* He wants, and for *whom* He wants it.

Now to be sure, all disciples of Jesus have the responsibility to proclaim the gospel. But I believe Jesus, in this parable, is referring to a select group of kingdom citizens that He has called, gifted, and set apart to be teachers of the truth for the benefit of others. Paul referred to these individuals in Ephesians 4 when he said that Jesus gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers to equip God's people for works of ministry and to facilitate growth and maturity in the church.

It's not that this select group of people have favored status with Jesus; it's simply that they have been assigned by Jesus to a certain role in His kingdom—the role of being stewards of God's treasure, the Scriptures. So, in light of this enormous privilege and responsibility, I would like us to consider a few things by way of application.

First, teachers of God's truth must be adequately trained. This is implicitly suggested in the first part of verse 52, "...every scribe *who has been trained* for the kingdom..." Jesus does not specify how disciples should be trained. However, His twelve disciples were trained by spending nearly every waking hour with Him for almost three years. They listened to him teach, they interacted with Him and asked Him questions in countless informal conversations, and they watched Him practice what He preached. No doubt, this has to be the most ideal, effective method of discipleship training, but it is certainly not the only one.

The Apostle Paul was rigorously trained in the Scriptures by Gamaliel, the most esteemed teacher in Judaism in his day. Of course, Gamaliel was not Jesus, and many of his interpretations were skewed, so just after his dramatic encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul spent three years in Arabia reading and pondering the Scriptures in the new light of Jesus as Messiah before he began his public ministry. After this he, too, was able to bring out of his treasure what is new and what is old.

There are numerous other ways of being trained in the Scriptures, and it does not necessarily have to involve formal training at a college or seminary. It can happen in the local church. It can happen in mentoring relationships, as it did with Paul and Timothy. But there are some essential components to this training without which I do not think a person is qualified to be entrusted with the responsibility of teaching the Word of God on a regular basis.

For example, a qualified Bible teacher must be intimately acquainted with *all* of Scripture, not just the Scriptures that have personal appeal to him/her, not just the ones that are uplifting, not just the ones that make people feel good. "*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (2 Tim. 3:16). This includes Scriptures that are unpleasant, distressing, difficult to understand, or hard to reconcile with other Scriptures.

When the Apostle Paul was addressing the Ephesian elders at the end of his ministry, and he was giving an account to them of the way he conducted himself and carried out his ministry, one of the things he said was, "*I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God*" (Acts 20:27). "I showed you how the books of Moses, the Psalms of David, the writings of Isaiah and all the other prophets pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ. I taught *all* of Scripture, so that you could understand God is in His fullness, His plan in its comprehensiveness, and how all of Scripture complements each other."

My second application of this parable is that teachers of God's truth must work hard to "cut it straight." In Paul's second letter to Timothy he gave an exhortation that applies to

every teacher of God's Word. He said, ¹⁵ *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth*" (2:15).

Paul likens someone who is preparing to preach and teach to a manual laborer. The word translated *worker* describes someone who toils in the hot sun, who exerts effort and energy until he is exhausted. He is implying here that hard work is required in preparing to preach and teach the Word effectively and successfully.

In order to teach a passage of Scripture well one must do due diligence, one must not take shortcuts, one must be willing to put in the time and effort that is necessary. Because, like mining for gold, the wealth in that passage is not necessarily on the surface and it may not be readily apparent. One has to dig for it, and extracting that wealth is hard work.

But I also want to emphasize the importance of accuracy. That is what Paul meant when he said, "rightly handling the word of truth." That word literally means, "to cut straight." It was used of a tentmaker who had to cut the camel hair cloth in just the right shape and size. It was used of a farmer plowing a straight furrow, or a stone cutter shaping the stone so that it would fit in the right place in the building.

The idea Paul is conveying is that precision and skill are required when interpreting the Scriptures. In fact, I would submit to you that no less precision and skill are required for interpreting Scripture than is required for a brain surgeon when performing surgery. Interpreting Scripture is eternally consequential. Not only is the health and maturity of the church dependent on it, but so are the eternal destinies of people.

Perhaps that is why the Apostle James said that not many should presume to be teachers of the Word, because those who teach will be judged more strictly.

But there is one more thing I want to address by way of application for those who are called to teach and preach the Scriptures. Teachers of God's truth must be under the influence of the Holy Spirit. They must be under the influence of the Holy Spirit both when they are studying the Scriptures and preparing to preach and teach, and when they are actually delivering the message.

It is entirely possible to be a Bible scholar, to be able to read and study the Bible in its original languages, to have read the Bible a thousand times, to have written books on the theological intricacies of the Bible, and not be what Jesus called a "scribe that has been trained for the kingdom of heaven."

As I said earlier, there were plenty of Scribes in Jesus' day who did not have a clue about the kingdom of heaven. Oh yes, they were habitual, dedicated students of the Scriptures. They could comment intelligently on many of the theological nuances of the law. But because they did not have the Holy Spirit to guide them into the truth, they read the words on the page and missed the One to whom those words were pointing. And it profited them nothing.

If a person is to truly understand the secrets of the kingdom and then be able to communicate those secrets to others, he/she must be under the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit (and the Spirit alone) who opens one's spiritual eyes to see spiritual truth. It is the Spirit who enables a person to see the Lord Jesus on the pages of the Old Testament. It is the Spirit who illumines the mind to enable one to discern the treasures in both Old and New Testaments. It is the Spirit who enables a person to assimilate and apply the truth.

Apart from the Spirit our efforts are in vain. And yet under the influence of the Spirit, those who teach the Scriptures can be used to transform lives, communities, and nations.

Brothers and sisters, the Word of God is the treasure of God. It is more to be desired

than gold, yes, than much fine gold (Ps. 19:11). Those of you who aspire to spend your life mining for that treasure, as I have had the privilege of doing, aspire to a noble task. But, first, make sure you are called, gifted, and set apart by God to do so. And if you are, go after it with gusto. Read and study all of Scripture. Work hard to “cut it straight.” And be sure that you ask the Holy Spirit to fill you and illumine you every time you open its pages, for your sake and for the sake of those who hear you.

“Treasure Trove of Truth” **Matthew 13:51-52**

Main Idea: *The disciples have received treasure in the teaching of Jesus; now they are to bring it out and teach others*

Understanding the Teachings of Jesus (51)

His clarifications and corrections about the kingdom

The “new” truth that contradicted expectations and traditional teaching

The Teachers in the Kingdom (52)

The meaning of “Scribe”

The training for the kingdom

The comparison to the master of a house

The stewardship of “treasure”

The meaning of “treasure”

The old and new treasure

The ability to discern and value all treasure

Application

Teachers of the truth must be adequately trained

Teachers of the truth must work hard to “cut it straight”

Teachers of the truth must be under the influence of the Holy Spirit