

**MATTHEW 13:44-46**  
**THE VISION OF THE KINGDOM**

What will you be hearing from here, in 2008? If the Lord wills...

\* For the next six weeks, we will ponder how to be “Faithful Stewards” of what God has given his people. We will spend two weeks each on how we use God’s blessings of time, talents and treasures.

\* Around Easter, we will begin to walk through the book of Ephesians. In this letter, Paul describes the richness of God’s grace, then shows us how God’s grace changes every area of our lives.

So what is a faithful steward? It is someone who uses wisely what he has been given. The steward is not the owner of what he possesses. He has been entrusted with using wisely, the resources of another.

All good gifts are from God. He is the Owner. We are the stewards. How do we make wise use of his gifts?

We start today with our treasures, as Jim Roszell begins his Sunday School class on “The Treasure Principle”, by Randy Alcorn.

My wife says this is mostly an issue for men, and she is probably right.

It usually goes something like this. She sends me back to the pantry for, let’s say, a new jar of peanut butter.

I see the flour. I see the Pop Tarts (of course!). I see the six bottles of pancake syrup that were a great deal. I do not see the peanut butter.

“I don’t see it!”

“It’s on the second shelf, right side!”

“Can you come find it?”

I see so clearly what I don’t need to see, and I don’t see what I must see.

If we are going to wisely use our treasures for God’s kingdom, we must see Jesus’ vision for the kingdom. In Matthew 13, Jesus directs our vision for his kingdom through a series of parables. Let’s use the parables I just read, and the parables before these parables, to see what we must see.

It’s not easy, is it? For men, it’s not easy to see peanut butter. For all of us, it’s not easy to see what we must see with God’s kingdom, because we see lots of other things. Before we think about what we must see, let’s be honest about **WHAT WE MAY SEE**.

As we live in the kingdom, we may see, first, **TRUTH FAILING**.

The first parable in Matthew 13 is the Parable of the Sower, where a man sows seed in a field.

The seed is the Word of God, which gives us what Jesus calls “the message of the kingdom.” Turn from your sins. Turn back to God, by turning to his Son in faith, who has come to reunite sinful people and a holy God.

But what happens when the seed is sown?

Some do not understand. The truth sown in their hearts is taken away.

Some receive it with joy. But the truth has no root. It does not last.

Some hear it and receive it, but worries and wealth choke it out.

Some hear it, understand it, and produce a great crop.

This is not a formula. Jesus is not saying that for every four people who hear the truth, one will believe the message, follow the Savior, and produce fruit. But Jesus’ words reflect the reality that so often when God’s Word is offered, people reject it, or accept it only for a time.

Have you seen this in a friend, a relative, even a spouse?

As Christians, we say God’s Word is powerful. We proclaim God will always accomplish his purposes

through it. But do we see this? Or do we sometimes see this parable before our eyes, and think the truth is failing?

We may see truth failing. We may see PEOPLE FAKING.

The next parable in Matthew 13 is the Parable of the Weeds. Jesus tells of a man who sows good seed in a field, but at night, the man's enemy sows weeds in the field. When the man discovers this, he decides to let the weeds and wheat grow together, because pulling the weeds may destroy the wheat.

The point is that in the part of the kingdom that we can see, there are true believers, and there are fake believers. There are those who are truly united with Christ, and there are those who are still apart from Christ.

The world has a word for this: "hypocrisy." The world is right. We are all hypocrites. We all have a gap between the faith we profess, and the lives we live. Yet Jesus is thinking here not just of how we all fail sometimes, but of how some will disrupt and even damage the message of the kingdom with the sin in their lives. They do not just fail, as we all do. They are fake.

It is discouraging. It is humiliating. You have claimed to be a Christian, and now this?

We may see truth failing. We may see people faking. We may see CHURCH FADING.

Next in Matthew 13, we read the Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Parable of the Yeast.

The kingdom of God, says Jesus, is like the mustard seed. It starts so small, but grows so large.

The kingdom of God, says Jesus, is like yeast. It quietly works its way through the whole batch of dough.

But that's hard for us to see. We live in a culture of the big and loud, not the small and quiet. What do we see, especially in our culture?

We see lower church attendance. We see the media caring about church, only when there is great tragedy or juicy controversy. We see a culture that generally pays attention to three things: sex, sports, and stocks.

Who cares about the church? At best, for so many, it's a "merry-berry" place: marry me and bury me. Otherwise, leave me alone.

Truth failing. People faking. Church fading. This is what we may see.

We don't like it, because we value success. Americans value the successful company, the successful football team, or the successful ministry.

And how do we measure success? By numbers. We are concerned with the number of people we get and the number of dollars we have. We do it with everything in life, and we do it in the church. So when the truth does not seem to be working, when fakers seem to drown out true believers, and when the church fades from prominence, we become discouraged.

In our discouragement, we may lose a vision for God's kingdom in our community, nation, and world. Why invest treasures in a place of failing, faking and fading?

That is what we may see. Now here is WHAT WE MUST SEE.

As Jesus describes what these men seek and receive in these parables, he reveals the kingdom values that must be deep in our hearts, if we are to be faithful stewards of our treasures.

His words reveal first that THE KINGDOM IS FOREVER.

We discover this as we think about the word "treasure," and what the man in the first parable does when he finds the treasure.

The word translated "treasure" describes a place of safe-keeping. Maybe as a kid, you had some sort of "treasure" box. You kept your valuable stuff there, so it would be safe.

Safety is on this man's mind, because Jesus tells us that when he finds this treasure, he hides it again, so no one will find it, until he can buy the field and gain the treasure for himself.

What will always be safe? What will remain forever? The kingdom.

Do you remember Jesus' words in Matthew 6?

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break

in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”

We are prone to invest so much in so much that will last for merely a moment in the span of eternity.

But the kingdom is a treasure that will last forever.

In “The Treasure Principle,” Randy Alcorn writes,

“Imagine you’re alive at the end of the Civil War. You’re living in the South, but you are a Northerner. You plan to move home as soon as the war is over. While in the South you’ve accumulated lots of Confederate currency. Now, suppose you know for a fact that the North is going to win the war and the end is imminent. What will you do with your Confederate money?

“If you’re smart, there’s only one answer. You should immediately cash in your Confederate currency for U.S. currency - the only money that will have value once the war is over. Keep only enough Confederate money to meet your short-term needs.”

Then he writes, “Earth’s currency will become worthless when Christ returns - or when you die, whichever comes first...”

“There’s nothing wrong with Confederate money, as long as you understand its limits. Realizing its value is temporary should radically affect your investment strategy. To accumulate vast earthly treasures that you can’t possibly hold on to for long is equivalent to stockpiling Confederate money even though you know it’s about to become worthless.”

The kingdom is forever. Only the kingdom is forever. Jesus has come to secure something far better than our “best life now.” He has come to secure our eternal life forever.

He has died for our sins. He has risen from the dead. He has ascended into heaven, where he sits at the right hand of the Father, until he returns.

Through faith in him, we are part of his kingdom forever, and he calls us to seek first his kingdom. No matter what else we want or do, we are to have a passion for God’s kingdom in our lives, and our world, for it is forever.

Yet Jesus’ words also call us to see this: **THE KINGDOM IS GLORIOUS.**

In the first parable, Jesus does not describe the treasure. But in the second parable, he tells us that the man seeks and finds fine pearls.

What are fine pearls like? They are costly.

But why are they costly? Because people value them.

But why do people value them? Because they are glorious to see, whether you own them yourself, or you see them on someone else.

What is truly glorious to us? Is it just whatever dazzles our eyes? Or is there something and Someone much more glorious than anything that will seem glorious in our eyes?

We live in a very visual society, and we have all sorts of opportunities to think we are seeing glory.

Is a movie star glorious? Is a popular singer glorious? Is a great athlete glorious? What about when thousands of people are gathered around them, screaming and waving and praising? Is that truly glorious? It seems so, but when we are seeing as God sees, is it really so glorious?

Our hearts must see that the kingdom, even when it seems to be full of failing and faking and fading, is truly glorious.

We must see the glory of...

\* A child learning about Jesus in a Sunday School class, and inheriting truths that will remain in his heart for all of life and all of eternity.

\* A saint entering forever, hand-in-hand with one who is praying her through to that moment.

\* A brother or sister in another nation, encouraged by the prayer and financial support of brothers and

sisters an ocean away.

\* A meal served to a broken and needy person, by a broken and needy person, in the name of Jesus.

\* Kids marching in here, and hearing the gospel during a week of the summer - a gospel they may never hear again.

\* A season of prayer, for one who has given his or her life to showing Jesus and telling of Jesus.

\* A restored marriage, through true repentance and real forgiveness.

\* A young person finding a place where other young people have found the trustworthy Jesus and trusted companions.

\* Little children, learning little by little about worship, so they can enter into a lifetime of worship.

\* Men and women and children coming before the throne, offering passionate prayers for the physically sick and spiritually lost.

\* A community ready to hear the truth proclaimed, knowing that indeed it accomplishes its purposes, in changing hearts and changing forever.

\* A young man or woman getting an education that will help them prepare for a lifetime of ministry.

\* A group of men and women coming together, to start a new church where the gospel seems to be fading.

\* A gathering of people, singing praise not to stars of stage, screen or sports, but to the glorious God of the universe.

This is glorious. When we see the kingdom that is forever and glorious, we will be faithful, passionate stewards of our treasures, and we will invest them in the treasure of the kingdom.

I recently read these words: "Money is like a truth serum. It brings out people's true nature."

This is true. Maybe this is why Jesus talked a lot about money. Jesus knew that our use of his treasures, reveals what we treasure in our hearts.

Let me offer this truth in the form of a principle, which I would like you to write down, stare at, think about, and pray about.

"I will invest in what is important to me."

It is true of you. It is true of me. It is true of all of us. We possess these treasures. Some have more, and some have less, but all of us have treasures, especially in our nation, where even the poorest are rich by the standards of the rest of the world. We will all invest these treasures in what is important to us.

We invest in nice homes. We invest in cool cars and clothes. We invest in fun vacations. We invest in exciting events. We invest in neat electronics.

None of that is necessarily wrong. But is it always the best?

Do we have a vision for the forever, glorious kingdom, or is that vision being obscured not only by the failing, faking and fading in the kingdom, but by our prosperous, consumer-driven, success-loving culture?

This is a matter for prayer. In this new year, as we shape our lives and priorities, I would like you to ask and answer two questions:

1. Do I have a kingdom vision?

2. Does my living and giving reflect a kingdom vision?

Please pray about this, and ask God to show you his vision, and how you should change your living and giving, to reflect that vision.

By ourselves, we will not do this. The pull of our culture is too great. But by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we can receive and live this vision.

Randy Alcorn tells a story from the life of John Wesley. He toured part of a big estate with an important landowner. It was quite impressive.

After they were done, they sat down to dinner. "Well, Mr. Wesley," asked the owner, "What do you think?"

“I think,” answered Mr. Wesley, “you’re going to have a hard time leaving all this.”

We see the struggles of the kingdom, and we see the supposed glories of our culture, and we think we would have a hard time leaving all this.

But in Jesus Christ, we see past what we think we are seeing, and we see what others do not see.

We see the forever, glorious kingdom. We will never leave this kingdom. So we store up for ourselves treasures...in heaven.