

THE GEM IN THE MUD



“The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field.”
Matthew 13:44

One of the ten richest men in the world went to bed one night and had a dream. In his dream he saw a gigantic pile of gold, rising like a mountain before his eyes. Suddenly there was an earthquake. As the earth shook, the mountain of gold melted, and sank and shriveled, until it was nothing but a puddle of mud. In his dream the man began to weep. “My wealth is gone! How can I face my family and friends? How will I survive?” Then, through his tears, the man noticed a gleam of light coming from the puddle of mud. He came closer and discovered a tiny gem lying in the mud.

“Now you’re looking at the real treasure,” said a voice from somewhere above him. “Find that gem, and gold will no longer be your master.”

“But what is it?,” asked the troubled billionaire, “and why is that beautiful gem lying in the mud?”

“The gem is my Kingdom,” said the voice. “You will *never* find this gem in a mountain of gold. *It’s always wrapped in mud.* But once you find this gem, you have *found the real treasure*, and gold will no longer rule your life.”

The man awoke with the memory of the dream branded on his soul. In the days that followed, he was obsessed with finding the gem. “*Find my Kingdom,*” the voice had said, “*and you have found the real treasure.*”

The billionaire’s family started to worry, as his business affairs were pushed aside, his social obligations neglected. Is he losing his mind? Has he become a fanatic? What are we going to do?

In his search for God's Kingdom, our billionaire decided to go back to church for the first time in many years. He began with the church he attended as a child. It was a smaller congregation now, but in other respects, it had not changed. The pastor preached eloquently about global warming, and the need to save the planet, before it's too late.

Beautiful words, and true.

But the man knew that this was not the gem.

Then our billionaire remembered driving by a sprawling set of buildings on the edge of town, where the parking lot was jammed with cars every Sunday. The sign out front read, "New Life Center." He parked his BMW and joined the crowd inside. The music was up-beat, and the preacher knew how to communicate as he waved his Bible in the air and attacked the evils of the world.

But the man just knew that this was not the gem.

"Maybe the Jews have it," he said to himself. "After all, Jesus was a Jew." So he found a Labovicher Synagogue, where there was great fervor and tons of joy.

But this, too, was not the Kingdom.

"Perhaps the Muslims are the ones with the gem," he reasoned. "They seem to be growing in numbers all over the world." He was given a warm welcome by the Imam and all the members of the Mosque.

But, when it was over, his heart was still empty.

He heard of a group meeting in a hotel downtown, where they practiced meditation and studied the spiritual masters of the ages. A strange feeling came over him as he sat there among the meditators. He felt like he was poised on the threshold of the spirit world, but something in his soul made him wary.

No, this was not the treasure.

One day when our billionaire was downtown at a board meeting, the discussion ran late. It was evening when he finally worked his way through the streets to the car park. He noticed a little storefront with a crudely painted sign, "JESUS SAVES" hanging above the door.

"What can I lose?" he said to himself. He slipped inside and took a seat in the back, while the folks were singing. Maybe two dozen souls were scattered through the room. A man went up to the front and began to teach about the sower and the seed, when, suddenly, a woman came bursting in the door howling with grief. She stumbled to the

front and threw herself on the floor, sobbing in anguish. Two women came and knelt beside her, placing their hands on her shoulders and speaking so quietly, only the suffering woman could hear. All the teaching and worshipping stopped, and a strange silence filled the room, as the focus was directed toward the woman's anguish.

At last she rose with a sigh and took her place beside her two new friends. Then the worship leader invited everyone to gather in the back room for a simple meal.

"*I think I've found the gem,*" the billionaire said to himself, as he joined the gathering at the meal table. "*This is the Kingdom of God,*" he told himself, as he broke bread with his sisters and brothers.

It could be a little storefront, or a mega church, or a handful of believers gathered secretly in a basement somewhere in China. It could be some praying souls on the bank of a river in an African jungle.

When it's the real thing,
the gem is always lying in the mud without shame.

A light shining in a dark place, as simple as the sunrise.



Yet the gem is always hidden from the natural eye.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field...

The Kingdom of heaven is like leaven hidden in a lump of dough...

The Kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed buried in the ground.



The Kingdom of Heaven is ...

where God's will is done on earth as it is done in heaven.

The Kingdom of God is ...

where God rules the heart, not money, or vanity, or lust for power.

The Kingdom of God is...

where Jesus, crucified and risen is allowed to speak his simple truth.

Strange thing about the Kingdom of God, we never see it until our pile of gold, or our mountain of vanity disintegrates and becomes a puddle of mud.

Only then do we have eyes to see the treasure.

There was a man named Zacchaeus who had a huge pile of gold. That pile was a testimony to his skill at tax-collecting. Zacchaeus knew how to scoop off some of that tax money for himself. But Zacchaeus was uneasy. Something within his soul was telling him that his gold was a dubious treasure. It seemed that his pile of gold was already beginning to lose its shine.

So when Jesus called him down from that tree, and said, "I'm coming to your house for dinner," Zacchaeus was overjoyed. He knew that he was looking at something far better than his pile of gold. Pretty soon his eyes opened, and he realized that a priceless gem was sitting at his table. Zacchaeus was so delighted that he immediately started dumping his gold.

*"Lord, half my goods I will now give to the poor.
And if I have defrauded anyone, I will now restore it fourfold."*

It's amazing how many people go to church year after year, and never discover the gem. How many people read their Bibles and quote scripture, yet haven't found the gem. How many preachers preach every Sunday for years and years, and still haven't found the gem. Because they're hanging on to a pile of gold or some vain ambition, or some ridiculous grudge.

They won't see the gem until that pile shrivels into mud.

And what about us? Are we willing to pray?....

"Lord, do whatever it takes to give us eyes to see the gem!"

Then turning to the disciples, he said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings

desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

Luke 10:23-24

Prophets and kings longed to see the gem and never saw it.

Thousands of people saw Jesus with their own eyes, *but they did not see the gem*. Multitudes were touched by his healing hand, fed with bread from five loaves and a couple fish, but they did not see the gem.

Only a handful saw the gem and entered the Kingdom, because their pile of gold, their mountain of vanity, had shriveled, till there was nothing left but mud.

And there was the gem, sparkling in the sunshine. So they left their fishing boats behind and followed Jesus. They sat down to eat with him and found themselves at a Banquet of the Kingdom of God.

That gem, lying in the mud, is the door to God's World.



His Gems courtesy of Graham Braddock
graham-braddock.pixels.com

Out here there's nothing but darkness.

Watch the news, look into your own heart, and what do you see?

But in there, beyond that open door, it's bright as day.

All we have to do is step into the Kingdom...
and *start walking in the light with God and with each other*.
Once we're in there, following the Master, he helps us....

to live by faith.

When we stumble, he lifts us up and helps us keep going...

to walk in love.

He teaches us to forgive, Keeps pouring his love into us, until we get over ourselves and learn to wash feet...

to live in hope.

He keeps us from forever looking back. Helps us to look ahead and prepare for the coming glory...

to forget our fears.

He empowers us to defy our fears and walk in the courage of heaven.



Carrying God's Presence Courtesy of Norohasina Harris
godsimage.co.uk

Who would have thought that the door to God's kingdom was so simple? Who would have imagined that the precious gem was so easy to find? We complicate things by looking for the big-time stuff.

The gem is no more wrapped in "big-time" than it's wrapped in gold.

Don't be looking for signs and wonders.

Don't be chasing after visions and revelations.

Look for the man, the woman, the people,
who walk with simple integrity in the footsteps of the Master...

and you will find the Kingdom of God.

Draw near...

and you will be touched by the power of Jesus' resurrection.

That's where the billionaire found the gem:
breaking bread in that back room in the store front.

The family of the billionaire was convinced he had lost his mind. They felt betrayed by his new-found faith in Jesus. After all, his pile of gold was their security too. And now it seemed to be shrinking by the day. What's going to happen to us, if this goes on? Doesn't he care? So the billionaire called his family together, and told them about his dream. He explained to them how he had searched for the gem in many places until he found it. *"Do I love you any less, now that I have found the Kingdom of God? I love you more!"* he said. *"If gold is your security, there is still plenty at your disposal. I won't keep it from you. But I must confess that since I've found the Kingdom, gold no longer means to me what it once did."* *"But Father,"* said his oldest son, *"we are living in the real world. We have to pay our bills and buy our groceries, and pay taxes and look after our children. We can't live without money!"* *"Who said you have to live without money?"* answered his father. *"Once you find the gem, money will still be an important part of your life. But now money will be your servant instead of your master."* His family shook their heads in sadness. They saw the poorhouse looming up before their eyes. And then a little girl spoke up and said, *"Grampa, I want to see what you see. I want to be where you are!"*

Jesus did not come to start a new religion. Jesus came to bring us that gem, God's Kingdom, which will one day fill the whole earth, visibly, with the glory of God.

That Kingdom is closer to us now than our breath.

Jesus promises that if we seek God's Kingdom above all things, everything else will take care of itself. If we walk in the way of God's Kingdom, we will already be breathing the air of the world to come.

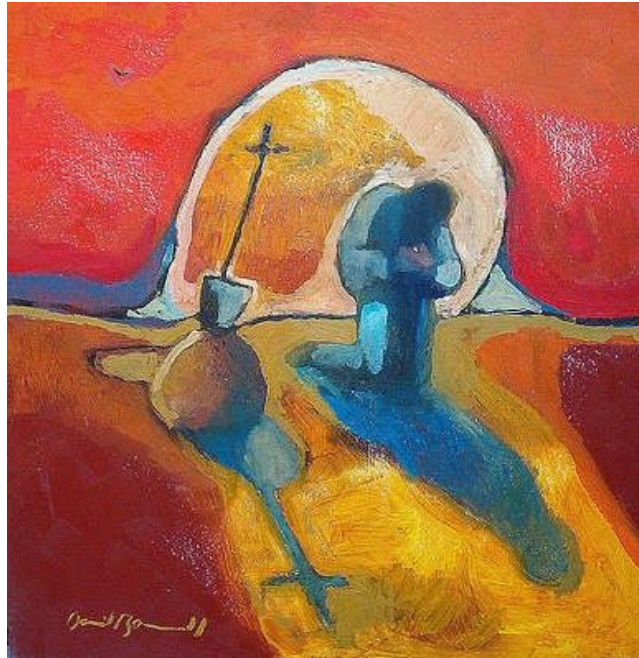
The way of God's Kingdom is so simple.

Every day anew, we watch our pile of gold, vanity, fear, resentment, fade in importance.

Every day anew we reach down, pick up the gem... and walk in its light.

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field.”

Matthew 13:44



*The Pearl of Great Price courtesy of Daniel Bonnell
partnerlessons.com*

Prayer

O Lord ... may we let go of our need for security, may we let go of our fears, our inhibitions and our vanity, and be willing to dig through the mud, without shame, for your priceless treasure. Seeking this precious gem until we possess it, cherish it, and nurture it with all we have. And, yes Lord, do whatever it takes to give us eyes to see this gem. Empower us to live by faith, to walk in love, to forget and even defy our fears in pursuit of your Kingdom. And each day help us to draw near to you and with pure hearts and pure motives, willingly following your footsteps into the mud where your beloved treasure lies. And each day may we reach down and lovingly pick up that precious gem covered in mud and walk in it's light.



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