

The Kingdom – a gift of immense value

All Saints - 27 July 2014 – Steve Potter

Matt 13: 31-33, 44-52 and Romans 8.26 -end

The area around this ancient church has seen massive urban development in the last 20 years. Over the road, the Monkston area was being built around 15 years ago and it was on July 7th 2000 that something remarkable was discovered on a site where there is now the road St Bartholomews near the green and community centre at Monkston.

What was found was something so special that it is now called the **Milton Keynes Hoard**. It consists of two large Bronze Age solid gold torcs, three smaller gold bracelets, other metal objects and a fine bronze age pot. The hoard was described by the British Museum as "one of the biggest concentrations of Bronze Age gold known from Great Britain". This very special hoard is not the only one in our area. There has also been the **Walton Hoard** of 97 Roman coins, found near Groveway in 1987.

How was the Milton Keynes Hoard found? Archaeologists¹ were closing down a dig nearby and, almost as an afterthought, invited a couple of metal detectorists to check around the area. These two² got a strong signal and alerted the archaeologists to the find. The hoard was valued at £290,000, declared treasure trove and the two metal detectorists were awarded a 60% share of the value. The landowner tried to muscle in, claiming that the finders had searched without permission, but that claim was dismissed.

The Milton Keynes Hoard now resides at the British Museum, but there are replicas on display at the Milton Keynes Museum³.

In ancient times, particularly in times of trouble, people buried valuables in secret places. Sometimes they never came back and others found their treasure many years later. Jesus drew on everyday events for his parables – the parable of the net is clearly that. I feel pretty sure there must have been a story circulating about the discovery of a buried hoard that Jesus adapted to be one of his illustrations. Just like in the case of the Milton Keynes Hoard, it sounds like there was an issue around the landowner and who had rights to the treasure.

We are now concluding our series looking at Romans 6-8. So how does the parable of buried treasure relate to this?

Jesus said that we should respond to the Kingdom of God just like the man who found that treasure. What God has done for us in and through Christ is a treasure that makes the Milton Keynes Hoard fade into insignificance. This section of Romans we have been exploring, from chapter 6 to 8, is all about our response to God's grace as we live a resurrection life (Ch 6), battle with old habits (Ch 7) and seek to be led by the Holy Spirit. In this last section of Ch 8, Paul draws his teaching together returning to remind his readers of the glorious riches in Christ.

¹ Brian Giggins and Paul and Charmian Woodfield

² Michael Rutland and Gordon Heritage

³ http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/pe_prb/t/the_milton_keynes_hoard.aspx

But he starts with where we are at (verses 26-27). Prayer can be difficult. Sometimes there are situations where we simply don't know what to ask for – either in prayer, or what to do in practice. Perhaps we should find it encouraging that Paul also faced this situation – or realised later that his prayers had been off-beam. What Paul realised though, was that God's communication system is set up to be robust and deal with our imperfections and frailties.

By way of illustration, there are some computer and messaging systems that are so frustrating to use, because, if you make the slightest error, your message goes off and vanishes never to be seen again – but it does not say it has vanished. Better systems let you know you have made a mistake, or ask 'Did you mean' Sometimes communication systems have a human mediator to check that inappropriate, malicious or foolhardy content does not go public. The Holy Spirit is our mediator in prayer. He makes sure that our messages get through and filters out our foolishness. But he is much better than any mediator for a website conference. He knows us and can intercede and transform our prayers. That should encourage us to pray in trust and love, even when we feel unsure about what we are praying.

That thought then leads Paul into applying this principle of confident Christianity more widely to draw together all his teaching in these chapters. Verse 28: 'In all things God works for the good of those who love him' – and we have this great outpouring (almost of praise), to hammer home the point about the total sufficiency of Christ meaning that nothing at all can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (v39).

In this, Paul is making a series of statements that William Barclay in his commentary on this passage views as a kind of creed. He is saying that we believe:

- that God did not spare his son, but gave him up for us all (v32)
- that Christ Jesus died for us (v34)
- that Christ Jesus was raised from death (v34)
- That we are justified through Christ Jesus (v33)
- that Christ Jesus is at the right hand of God (v34)
- that Christ Jesus intercedes for us (v34)
- that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (v39)

It is interesting to compare Paul's creed here with later church creeds. These do draw upon a wider selection of scripture, but the big emphasis is on Christ interceding for us – just like his Holy Spirit intercedes in our prayers. Paul is talking about the confidence that we have because of Christ the Intercessor.

In fact, this is more like the Iona creed we used today.

One thought is that we call some of our ecumenical churches after characteristics of Christ. We have Christ the Cornerstone, Christ the King, Christ the Vine, Christ the Servant King and Christ the Sower (School). I did a web search on 'Christ the Intercessor' and I could not find a church with that name anywhere.

But let's get back to that hoard of buried treasure. What did that man do with the treasure he found? Jesus did not say – probably because the story had served the point he wanted to make. The earlier parable of the mustard seed and yeast say more.

Paul's creed-like statements are about our unassailable place in the Kingdom of God and that this is not through what we have done, but through what Christ has done for us. The buried hoard parable is about what Paul says concerning the value of being in Christ's kingdom. The other kingdom parables give us a picture of the effect of the Kingdom – of our task as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. In Jesus' parable he points out that a tiny bit of yeast has an amazing effect on a vast amount of dough. We are called to be the people through whom Christ's Kingdom is seen and to have a Kingdom impact in all that we do. And he will be with us as we live out of redeemed life.

Paul emphasises the confidence we can have in being saved by Christ, but we are saved to serve and be his light in the world.