

***Bringing Forth Treasures:  
A Wise, Old Metaphor for Ministry with a Bright Future***

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2009 Calvin Symposium on Worship

**Let a conference on parables take note of Jesus' own capstone teaching on his parables:**

**“Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” (Matt. 13:52)**

“And so it happens that every Scripture scholar who has been disciple to the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a house who can draw out of his treasure chest both new things and old things” (trans. Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Churchbook* [Eerdmans, vol. 2, 54])

“Once you’ve been taught about the kingdom of heaven by me, you’re going to be like someone who’s been given full authority over an incredibly rich castle. There will be nothing you lack and nothing you’ll ever exhaust the wonder of. . .” (Robert Farrar Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment* [Eerdmans, 2002], 142)

**So let us reconsider the Symposium as . . . . .a treasure hunt**

**1. This is a gathering of Jesus' apprentices—including those viewing this session in California, Massachusetts, and Connecticut (!)—in training for the full “kingdom of heaven” vision Jesus proclaimed, . . .**

- *Apprenticeship*: Students “discipled to Jesus. . . are never independent contractors or even graduates in the kingdom. . . they are Jesus’ perpetual undergraduates” (Bruner 54).
- *For all of us*: While Matt. 13:52 offers a specific reference to the “grammateus”/the Torah-scribes, it also is also frequently interpreted as “every careful listener to what I’ve been teaching you” (Capon, 142). In this text, “Jesus teaches us, his students in the kingdom, to teach in the same way” (Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 114). “To be a disciple means primarily for Matthew to give heed to teaching. . . the teaching of parables and their understanding is discipleship at his best.” (Dean Deppe, Calvin Seminary, correspondence)

**2. . . . which gives us all a chance to practice both “bringing out” and finding treasures, . . .**

- The treasures of the kingdom are not for self-indulgence, but for “bringing out.” This is part of the missionary enterprise that Matthew emphasized in the great commission (Matt. 28:10).
- Think not here of the treasures of a large museum (protected, most-often merely admired), but the treasures of a pharmacy, hospital supply room, a library, Red Cross supply truck, a consignment store in the middle of the Great Depression.
- *Does not bringing out treasures carry with it a kind of infectious enthusiasm, delight, joy, gratitude, wonder, and expectancy (like children exploring the treasure chest at a dentist’s office ☺)? This is a mission driven not by fear, greed, or selfish ambition, but by holy, infectious joy.*

### 3. . . . out of a vast “treasure chest” (literally, in Greek a “thesaurus”). . .

- Note how in our context (information age, age of global communication, access to historical resources), we are stewards of more treasures than ever.
- The treasures we have access to (some now, more in future) come from all tribes and cultures: “the kings of the earth will bring their treasures. . .” (Rev. 21:24; also Isaiah 60);
- This “bringing out” requires intentionality—a discerning eye for the moment into which we’ve been called, and the message we need to communicate.
- As with Jesus’ [and Matthew’s] own bringing out, this may involve bringing out treasures which both comfort and trouble. And the wisdom of what we bring out may be hidden—better than even we can fully understand
- *Also—praise God—the bringing out of treasures not need be stingy!*

### 4. . . . of both new and old, the old-in-the-new, and the new-in-the-old. . .

- In the immediate context, this is a reference to the relationship of Old and New Testaments—a distinctive concern of Matthew. Patristic sources (Irenaeus, Origen, Chrysostom) especially insisted that this text should combat depreciation of the Old Testament.
- With appropriate caution about overextending this argument, we can note that the text is also frequently understood as presenting a useful posture for teaching and learning in the kingdom, where the interplay or juxtaposition of new and old offers indispensable insight.

Beverly Roberts Gaventa: The text resists “innovation-phobia” and “tradition-phobia”: “Matthew 13:52 may help us to recognize both these illnesses for what they are—blatant contradictions of the gospel itself. Not every new wind is a Nor'easter that will shake the church's very foundations. Neither is every stone in the foundation the makings for a prison. Both the new and the old belong in the householder's treasure. Both the new and the old may serve the church. Both the new and the old may reflect the gospel of Jesus Christ.” (“Both the Old and New,” *Christian Century*, June 30-July 7, 1993, p. 669).

Robert Farrar Capon: “Pick up any [true kingdom treasure] and it will, always and without fail, turn out to be both an antique and a novelty at the same time. And that, when you think of it, is no surprise: the Word who lays up this whole *thesaurus* for us lays it up first and foremost in the land of the Trinity where everything is, all at once, older than eternity and as fresh as the breath of the Word who speaks it into being. . .”(146)

Tom Wright: “As we ponder Jesus’ stories. . . we should always be asking ourselves: what might it mean today to be a ‘scribe trained for the kingdom of heaven’? How can we be sure, in our thinking, our speaking and our living, that we are both rooted in the old and also bearing the new, fresh fruit of the kingdom of heaven?” (*Matthew for Everyone* [SPCK, 2002], 178)

There is resistance here to both nostalgia and faddishness; there is advocacy here for a gospel that is timeless and timely. (with thanks to Dean Deppe)

## A SAMPLING OF (SCRIPTURAL) TREASURES

... that are desperately needed by apprentices of Jesus in North America today

... including both scriptural teaching and themes, as well as present-day embodiments of scriptural practices

... in parallel with Gerardo Oberman's lecture on renewal in South America

(We both are working on this bringing-out-treasures business. We best do this in concert, though the treasure we each focus on may be different).

### 1. The treasure of "take-a-second-look" scripture study by commentators, artists, preachers

Think of the way the parable of the prodigal son—drawing deeply on Old Testament motifs of Jacob and Esau—inspired Rembrandt, whose painting was treasured by Henri Nouwen, whose *Return of the Prodigal Son* was treasured by Larry Gerbens, whose artistic commissions make possible all the of art in "The Father and His Two Sons," which are further challenged by the exegetical insights of Kenneth Bailey, and then are preached and sung and portrayed and proclaimed by 1,000 of you—all of which by the Holy Spirit's power—generates such an electricity about the miracle and grace of the waiting Father that it becomes a source of healing and conversion. . . .

*See also Carol Bechtel's recent book; "Singing the New Testament," Dennis Dewey's scripture proclamation; Kevin Adams' congregational scriptural memory project; sermons this weekend by Craig Barnes, Mary Hulst, Marva Dawn, Setri Nyomi, Frank Thomas, and Luke Powery; art by Steve Prince, Julie Quinn, Jonathan Quist, and Ed Roijas, Sandra Bowden's compilation of artistic images, scripture-based songs or art pieces produced by junior high or high school students; Fritz West's understanding of lectionaries, Rae Whitney's hymns, K. Lee Scott's anthems, music by Martin Tel, Robert Hobby, and Diae White-Clayton, Rosanne Barton-DeVries on dance, Steve Caton's approach to congregational art, music published by Kelly Dobbs Mickus and Mark Lawson, Dale Savidge's scripts, and many more.*

### 2. The treasure of "holy astonishment" and the glory of the triune God

*One thing I have asked of the Lord. . . that I will behold the beauty of the Lord (Psalm 27:4)*

*So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. (Psalm 63:2)*

" . . . We earnestly labor to make the perfections in which God's glory shines better and better known. His benefits towards ourselves we extol as eloquently as we can. Thus people are incited to reverence his majesty, render due homage to his greatness, feel due gratitude for his mercies, and unite in showing forth his praise. In this way there is infused into their hearts that solid confidence which afterwards gives birth to prayer. . . "

—John Calvin, *On the Necessity of Reforming the Church*

Those who worship lose themselves in God, forget themselves, in order to think of God alone, to let the lustrous beams of God's virtues shine upon them, and to cause to radiate forth from their own

souls the reflex of the greatness of God as it mirrors itself in their deeply moved and wonder-wrapped souls.

—Abraham Kuyper, *Near Unto God*

Still, why is it that so many books about worship have so little to say about God?

*See (birthday boy) John Calvin, and as well as Symposium contributions by Mark Yaconelli, Craig Barnes, Ron Man, Bob Roeglin, Marva Dawn, Sharon Veltema, Ellen Van Schoiack, Derek Kealli Polishuck, Sam Hamstra, Joyce Zimmerman, Chip Stam, Mark Altrogge, and many more. . . .*

### **3. The treasure of intentional, disciplined, “de-centering”, intercessory prayer**

*See Debra and Ron Rienstra’s new book on language, Harry Boonstra’s reflections on Kuyper’s approaches to worship and prayer, Jenn and Tony Tendero’s prayer ministry, especially against the backdrop of the demise of public intercessory prayers in so many churches.*

### **4. The treasure of cultural poise**

*See Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture (in the conference program book), plus contributions by Mark Charles, Gerardo Oberman, Horacio Vivares, Young Kim, C.J. Kingdom-Grier, Setri Nyomi, Richard Mauney, Kurt Selles, and many more.*

### **5. The treasure of hospitality**

*See Erik Carter and Barbara Newman’s sessions on worship that includes persons with disabilities, Herm Keizer’s sessions on military veterans—whatever your congregation’s view of military service or military conflict is, Craig Satterlee’s stories, including those in small or dying congregations, Jonathan Bradford’s work with urban housing, various sessions on intergenerational worship, as well as discussions about worship in prisons, high schools, and Alzheimer’s units.*

### **6. The treasure of the holy meal**

*See sessions by Paul Galbreath, Todd Billings, and many others on the nourishing feast of the Lord’s Supper.*

### **7. The treasure of “discerning the spirits”**

*See sessions by Simon Chan, David Daniels, Suzanne McDonald, Setri Nyomi, Alexis Abernethy, David Wood, Wes Granberg-Michaelson, Scott Hoeszee, Michael Wittmer, Kim Long, Kurt and Lori Wilson, Kevin Corcoran, Peter Rollins, Jason Clark, James K. A. Smith, Ena Heller, and many others who can help us discern wise responses to understandable, but ultimately simplistic and harmful ways of speaking of the nature of pastoral excellence, science, the emerging church, leadership, and divine action in worship.*

A sampling of puzzlers that need careful discernment:

- “How nice that the Powerpoint failed today; that way the Holy Spirit really could lead”
- “Wow, the New Testament doesn’t really say much about worship. I guess that pretty much any form of worship is equally fine as long as you worship from your heart.”

## 8. The treasures of common practices

Some years ago, a new young worship leader attended this conference and enthusiastically reported about the cool new thing he had learned at Symposium: "At the end of Scripture you can say - The word of the Lord - and everyone responds Thanks be to God!" . . .

. . . What is taken for granted by many can be a source of joy for others—which then can help all of us re-discover the value of the practice in the first place. . .

. . . **and that is only the beginning.** . .

**In sum, all thanks and praise to God for the lavish storehouse of treasures entrusted to us.**

### **Epilogue: Going Home from the Symposium**

When you go home from here, you'll have the challenge to discern which treasures to bring out for your congregation's journey of apprenticeship to Jesus. There is no reason for the treasures to remain hidden. . . (How sad it is that so many conferences end up making such a little difference because the conference folder simply ends up on a shelf!)

- There may be far more treasures here than any of us will ever be able fully to explore. And that means—happily—**that you can be picky**. If there are 20,000 songs available to you in print today, you'll then be able to pick the top .01% for use in your church in the next year (there is no good reason any church should have to sing very many average songs!). And if there are 30,442 verses in scripture, you'll preach or study only 2% of them in the next year. So make your choices well, remembering that "apprenticeship to Jesus" is the goal.
- Many treasures you find here may **need some polishing**. (We happily aim for organic, thoughtful excellence, but not a kind of "studio perfection." We are willing to take some risks with some treasures that await polishing).
- Many treasures require **some explanation** when you take them home. (Pharmacists, librarians, and museum docents each offer treasures to us, but almost never without some explanation).
- When you bring out these treasures, some people are likely to be mystified, perplexed, and troubled. There is good precedent for this (!)—provided that what is mystifying is the gospel itself and not merely our own mode of presenting it.

May each of us discover in the process of "bringing out treasures" a kind of infectious joy,

the joy of a pharmacist who identifies the perfect antibiotic to bring deep healing, the joy of an economist who finally breaks through to discover the root cause of an economic downturn, the joy of a presidential speechwriter who finds a memorable turn of phrase to inspire a nation; . . . . .

but of course, even more so the joy of someone who has just discovered the way the life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ offers healing to a deeply broken world. . .