

Romans 8:26-39 Hidden Treasure
Matthew 13:31-33; 44-52
July 26, 2026

From the time of my childhood, I have been attracted to the sport of Track and Field, which like, soccer, has another name in the rest of the world; it is called, Athletics. More particularly I have been interested in the events of middle distance running; the mile.

I must admit that the attention of the world is less intense than it was back then and in the years just before I was born; less intense than the attention given to many other more popular sports. Last week, however, it made the news on ESPN, and not even in an Olympic year.

For some reason, in the time after the end of the Second World War, the world paid almost as much attention to the pursuit of the four-minute-mile as it did to other things. Roger Bannister, an English medical school student, on his lunch break from the last of his clinical rotations before graduation, was the first to break the barrier.

I can remember the names of others; Jim Ryun. There was John Walker from New Zealand, who was the first to run under 3:50, and the British trio in the 1980s of Steve Cram, Steve Ovett, and Sebastian Coe.

Later came the Noureddine Morceli and the great Hicham El Gerrouj whose name just sounds like it should be fast, and who lowered the world record to

3:43.1 twenty-seven years ago in 1999 where it until last weekend, when Scotsman Josh Kerr ran 3:42.66, which even made the news on ESPN.

These kind of human pursuits are accompanied by accomplishments in other facets of life; such as science, the attempt to return to space, colonize the moon and Mars, create an artificial intelligence that will benefit and not harm humanity; solve the energy needs of the world, end war and poverty, find better justice, things like that. It is the human habit to be either hyper-pessimistic or hyper-optimistic about the chances of success.

All the while the religious life of the world goes on, the claims of the Christian faith persist in spite of many examples of failure and difficulty in its life and the efforts of some to discredit them. If there is one deterrent to success it is the divisions among us; the willingness to judge or condemn one individual or another, one group of people or another, with returned sentiments abounding.

One wonders, in the face of it all, what is meant by grace? What do we mean when we say we believe in the Grace of God? Some concentrate on immediate things, the living of everyday life. Who can blame them, the demands of the day must be given attention. Is there really time and energy to think of eternity, transcendence?

This collection of parables in The Gospel of Matthew address the human situation. They come to us as

scenes from everyday life; a farmer in a field, a garden with a hidden treasure, a kitchen with flour and yeast. Yet they are presented to us as stories about the The Kingdom of God.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed captures the relationship between small and big things by drawing our attention to small seeds that grow into big plants. In a related way The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price remind us that value is sometimes found in the smaller more rare things in life, sometimes there is hidden treasure, more precious than anything else.

And the story of the leaven has always captured my attention. A little yeast has a big affect. The difference between the seed and the tree is obvious enough. The bread and the yeast is absurdly exaggerated, about sixty pounds of flour. I always imagine the dough exploding out the kitchen windows whenever I read this parable.

I even asked AI what size loaf would result from 60 pounds of flour and the corresponding amounts of salt and yeast. Basically it said such a loaf would collapse under its own weight, but if someone did happen to pull it off, it may rise to the size of a checked bag at the airport, so, bigger than most ovens, but not most kitchens.

Many interpreters scale it down by calling it a “large amount of flour.” The fifty or sixty pounds of flour could feed 150 people or so. I suppose they are right,

but have this nagging notion that they are missing the point. The only way to bake this amount of dough would be to break it into smaller sections, AI suggested 50 to 70 normal sized loaves, so that it could fit into an actual oven.

But Jesus doesn’t do that. It is as if he is saying, “you don’t have an oven big enough for this.” The meaning of these parables is that God’s Kingdom far outreaches not only our *expectations and imagination*, but also our capabilities. And he is telling us that the Kingdom is at hand. We don’t have control over it, anymore than we have eyes to see it or ears to hear it.

Further, these stories tell us is that no matter what is happening in the world of human beings, there are also things happening in God’s realm, The Kingdom of Heaven. So let that capture our imagination.

Anyone who looks at the church in the world today, or in its history at any time, will likely be overwhelmed by its limitations and failures and it’s small, this world expectations. That is true enough.

Here, Jesus challenges us as his audience, to reconsider our understanding of the world, and of The Kingdom of Heaven, which makes itself known in both concrete and empirical ways, on the one hand; and on the other, the ways of the Spirit, which are not so easily seen and measured, and are sometimes hidden.

As interesting as they are, human pursuits such as lowering the world record in the mile are secondary,

and have no lasting value. They may seem important in their place and time, but in the eternal scheme they are less important. When we place them above the things of God, they involve us in idolatry, and end in disappointment.

“Life is more than food and clothing,” Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. And the primary way he tells us to think about it is in parables.

These parables are interesting because they are suggestive and demand of us that we do our own thinking. They are open-ended and sometimes hard to interpret. Their purpose is to tell about God and people and the world, but Jesus also tells his disciples that he uses them to hide things, keep people from seeing and understanding the things of God. Could it be that God wants us to learn to think theologically for ourselves?

God, as presented in these little stories, is gracious and merciful to almost everybody except the religious leaders who *are* interested in telling people how to think to give them concrete answers. Ears to hear, eyes to see, are gifts of grace.

Apparently, God doesn't want to be encumbered with people who want to be given all the answers and practical solutions to all the questions and problems that arise in life.

God wants us to serve and love without compulsion. I think of all those runners and how hard running is, and

how, when push comes to shove, success often comes to those who really want to be there, for the joy of it.

God does not want our love and devotion under compulsion, but the kind revealed in the characters in the stories who run off and sell everything to buy the field with the hidden treasure or the precious jewel. God does not desire a love given in order to receive a reward or avoid a punishment, and we often talk about rewards and punishments, but seeks the kingdom just for the sheer and crazy love of God.

Who wants to be friends with someone who does not want to also *be* a friend? Yet when we are devoted to Jesus out of the center of our being, life opens up like a big loaf of bread that takes up the whole oven once the leaven has done its work. Then all bets are off.

[Back](#)[Home](#)