

# Treasures New and Old

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



*"Treasure Chest"*

## Prayer of Illumination

Lord God, we thank you for your Word that gives us wisdom and understanding for our living. Your word tells us: wisdom's income is better than silver and her revenue better than gold. She's more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her. So fill us now with joy as you reveal your secret and hidden treasures found in your Word and in Christ, the Word made flesh.  
Amen.

## Background

Matthew quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures many times in his gospel. In fact, that's why it's the first gospel. Matthew is the perfect bridge from the old to the new, from Old Testament to New Testament. A few verses before our morning's parable, Jesus quotes from the Hebrew Prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament:

*"I will open my mouth to speak in parables,  
I will proclaim what has been hidden  
since the foundation of the world."*

Jesus is boldly saying he's the Divine Yes to all of God's ancient promises. His words and parables are new and revolutionary, yet timeless. Jesus doesn't so much start with a blank slate as he reframes or

fulfills the old. The old isn't abolished, it's completed. Made perfect. Made new. Jesus then tells his disciples these beautiful words:

*"To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven."*

Under the tutelage of the Teacher, the disciples and us are well along the road of understanding. Now it's our turn to creatively share the kingdom of God with others, like Jesus—using both the new and the old.

*So let's hear the Word of the Lord from ...*

**Scripture: Matthew 13:51-52 (NRSV)**

"Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes."

And Jesus said to them, "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."

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

**SERMON – Treasures New and Old**



In 2010, twenty-something Jenny Dawson from Scotland was working for a prestigious hedge fund, making bank. She happened to read a news article that day that really disturbed her: People were arrested for searching through grocery market dumpsters in search of their next meal.

Although a banker, Jenny grew up on a farm. She felt called to return to her roots to tackle food waste. In 2021, 957 million people around the world lack of food—the number has increased by 150 million during the pandemic. Despite this, each year 1.3 billion tons of produce are thrown away around the world. Hungry people don't get this food. But food surviving the journey from "farm to fork" isn't as easy as it sounds. Farmers need to purposely over-produce to cover potential losses. So they know from the get-go that a lot of what they grow will never be eaten.

Then add into the mix the complexities of proper storage for perishable items, supply and demand, and distribution. On top of that, we grocery shoppers are a notoriously finicky lot. Maybe you didn't know this, but we're all fruitists and vegetablists: we judge the character of a fruit by its skin. Over a quarter of all produce is thrown away in the US just because the fruit isn't pleasing to the eye—even though it's perfectly delicious and nutritious. But other negatives happen when good produce is discarded: there are massive and unnecessary amounts of greenhouse gas emissions and waste management expenses.

Back on the farm in Scotland, Jenny's mom had her own ways of preventing the waste—she would make use of the excess produce to make jams, chutneys, and condiments, saving them from the trash bin so family and friends could enjoy the fruits of the harvest in new and longer-lasting forms.

So just over a decade ago, Jenny Dawson wanted to try her mom's strategy and recipe on a grander scale. Shelving her banking career, Dawson started a company called "Rubies in the Rubble," kind of like "diamonds in the rough" but these jewels are edible.



Her company's motto is to put to good use the things that are discarded in our society without reason. Jenny shares that everything and everyone is unique and has value. You just have to look closely enough and be creative. You have to look at everything as precious and priceless—and you'll find treasures in the unlikeliest of places.

Dawson buys the overstocked and slightly blemished produce destined for the rubbish heap at steeply discounted prices and transforms it into ketchup and gourmet sauces. Or as the [Rubies in the Rubble](#) website puts it:

*"Some say it's a load of rubbish, we take that as a condiment."*

Her products are distributed in thousands of grocery stores and restaurants throughout the UK.

Dawson helps transform people's vision to see wonder where others see waste. And she applies this principle to people, too. We often judge and dismiss a person by their looks in the same way we judge an apple with a small blemish on it. So Dawson looks to hire women struggling to find work because of homelessness and drug addiction. Vagrants are transfigured into productive employees. Dawson employs a man with brain damage to help label jars of food.



When I heard this story, it seemed to me to be a modern day enactment of Jesus' parable,

- "Bring out of your storehouse treasures old and new."

For Rabbi Jesus, wisdom and understanding are of the utmost importance. In fact the Apostle Paul describes Jesus as the Wisdom of God, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and understanding. Jesus tells us the wisdom of understanding, utilizing both the new and the old.

- Divine wisdom is more BOTH/AND than EITHER/OR.
- Don't discount the new by turning the golden days of yore into a golden calf.
- Don't dispense of the old for flashy fads and trends.
- Sift and sort through both new and old, discarding the folly and wickedness, and retaining the priceless treasures of wisdom and guidance.
- The new and the old together keep our faith and life fresh rather than stale or stagnant. Christ's wisdom is cross-generational.
- Learn from the past—don't repeat or replicate it. Reappropriate the past to your present.



So, what is "the new" in this parable? Jesus and the kingdom of God. The good news of the gospel. The New Testament.

What's "the old"? The Hebrew Scriptures. Diligently study both the New and the Old Testaments. Learn about Judaism and the Jewishness of Jesus.

The church has been starved of this important heritage and it is so refreshing. Mixing old and new is a great antidote to cognitive and spiritual entrenchment. But I think this parable goes further than that. Be student of new and ancient ideas and people—wherever wisdom can be found.

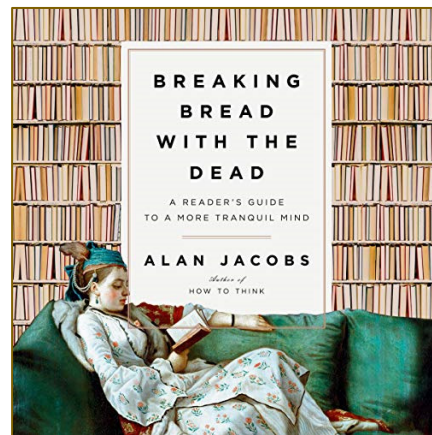
All truth is God's truth.

Stay open—be a learner. But never become learned. That’s the death knell for growth.

For the follower of Christ, there’s always room for the new AND the old—the old fashioned and the newfangled. You have to keep the two talking to one another.

The new is first: seek ye FIRST the kingdom of God and all of these things will be added unto you. Jesus and the kingdom are the lens through which the treasures of the past are enlightened.

One of the ways that we can do this is to read dead authors and dead poets and the great saints of old. Author GK Chesterton describes tradition as “a democracy that includes the voices of the dead.” Poet W.H. Auden calls studying old books “breaking bread with the dead.”



Being a disciple of Jesus means being a learner, so interrogate the writings and lives of the wise over the centuries. Don’t get stuck in the ghetto of your place and time. Preserve past insights, but also enlarge them.

Cultivate friendships, not only with your peers, but with those older and younger than you. Children teach us wonder and seniors teach us wisdom. We need both—Luke Skywalkers and Yodas.

It’s not good to only be informed by newspapers and hot off the press best sellers. Read outside what you’re familiar with. Blow the dust off some old treasures. Revisit them again. Mine and dig for their wisdom. Engaging strange and different ideas of bygone eras broadens your faith horizons, widens your spiritual bandwidth, deepens your emotional intelligence, and makes your thoughts weightier. Our forebearers of the faith can help us step outside of ourselves and our time to get better perspective, different angles, and more distance from the thick of things.



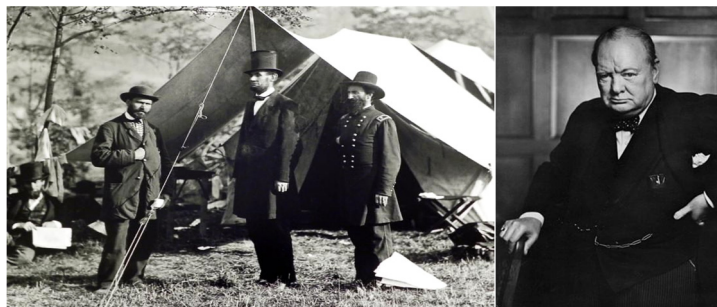
If we only engage the newest, the latest and the greatest, we get enamored with “the now.” The “not-now” is deemed stale and passe, but engaging the old, keeps us humble. It reminds us we don’t have it all figured out and that we stand on the shoulders of giants.

Pride in the present: presentism, make an idol of the present. Discarding the past, we think we’ve evolved and arrived and that the past is so primitive and pitied. And then history repeats itself. The future will cringe at us.

Solely focusing upon the now limits yourself. If you only listen to familiar voices from today’s echo chamber, you’re only going to hear repeated and regurgitated tropes. Your thinking will become stagnant and cliché. But there’s another source of pride—being stuck in the past. If you disdain the new, you miss new opportunities, new expressions. You ignore the failings of the past. Nostalgia sets in. You become closed, rigid, and inflexible, a spiritual fuddy-duddy, dying long before your eventual funeral. This happens to both the chronologically young and the old. Learning from the treasures of the old AND the new, you get the best of both worlds. You can be –

- intuitive AND analytical,
- spontaneous AND measured,
- hopeful AND realistic,
- conventional AND creative.

Being a learner in the ways of the kingdom helps you share and show the good news of Christ with the accumulated wisdom of kind, intelligent, and time-tested voices through the ages. You’ll have a fresher continuity and connection with those who have gone before us. Our forebears will keep teaching us long after they’ve returned to the dust.



There have been times in my life, where I’ve been reading about Abraham Lincoln or Ulysses S. Grant or Winston Churchill, and I felt like they were by my side teaching me powerful lessons about how to pastor or even parent in the here and now. I like how novelist Thomas Pynchon describes it:

“The more you dwell in the past and in the future, the thicker your bandwidth and the more solid your persona. But the narrower your sense of now, the more tenuous you are. It may get to where you’re having trouble remembering what you were doing five minutes ago.”



Keep pouring over the ancient Scriptures for your fresh daily bread. Cherish the old hymns and ancient liturgy, but don't forget that God gives you a new song—and there are great songs yet to be composed. Feed your soul with both classical and modern art, music, cinema, literature, design, you name it. Don't get boxed into a certain era or genre.

- Jesus reminds us that tomorrow's wisdom is found afresh in the past. It's not only good as new, but good as old.
- Keep the ancient and the future talking in your life. They protect us from cognitive and spiritual entrenchment.
- Remix the old-fashioned with the new-fangled.
- Combine the preservation of the past with the innovation of the future. It's a creative tension.
- Plan, but also improvise. Step out in faith. Try making some new mistakes. It's okay if you mess up—Christ will dust you off.
- Utilize your knowledge and your experience in a new light and a new service in the church and the world.
- Don't give up your gifts—they're now repurposed and renewed by Christ. You can glorify God and serve Christ through your past—your expertise, experiences, encounters, and lessons learned for the Lord's work.

What training from your past can you bring to the Lord's Table for his service today? Let your light shine. Bring out your personal storehouse of unique treasures—old and new. Put them on display for the world to see. Own them. Use them. Share them.

It's not like going to a museum, where you pay a ticket, observe from a distance some great work of art, and then leave it there. It's not yours. No, with Christ in you, you're a national treasure. Christ's workmanship. A one of a kind masterpiece.



So make it your ambition to be a Scribe of the kingdom, a student of the Savior, trained in the kingdom.

I'd like to close with a paraphrase of a great passage from the intertestamental Wisdom Book of Sirach. In it we get a mission statement and clarion call for aspiring scribes:

Scribes penetrate the subtleties  
and hidden meanings of parables.  
They learn what is good,  
and set their hearts to rise early  
and seek the Lord who created them.  
God fills his scribes  
with the spirit of understanding,  
so they might pour forth words of wisdom,  
meditate upon the mysteries of the Lord,  
and open their mouths in prayer.

Immanuel, whether you're old or young, may you live your life with spiritual vim and vigor. Be a scholar and scribe of the Savior, well-studied in the ways of the kingdom. Be disciplined in the Way, the Truth, and the Life—sitting at the feet of Jesus, walking in his footsteps, taking up your cross each and every day, and taking the gentle and humble Christ's yoke upon you. For you will find rest for your souls. And you will learn much from Him.

Amen.

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