

The parable of the treasures * Matthew 13:44-46

October 8, 2023 * Thanksgiving * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

I'd like to invite you to turn with me to our parable today, Matthew 13:44-46. We're going to jump right into the parable this morning. Matthew 13:44-46, the parables of the treasures.

44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

Not a lot there and yet there is SO MUCH there! Jesus has said very little and yet said SO MUCH! This is one of the most profound statements of the Gospel in all of Scripture.

Because in a sense, Jesus is saying this:

The Kingdom of Heaven is worth more than anything we have and worth giving everything we have to receive.

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Let me explain to you why I say that.

First, the kingdom of heaven is worth more than anything we have.

In the world of the parables, we meet two people to happen to discover a treasure that's worth a whole lot of money.

In the first parable, there's a man out in a field. Chances are good that he's a day labourer, paid to work the boss's field and he's out there slaving away in the sun when all of a sudden – THUNK! – his hoe hits something in the dirt. He gets down on his hands and knees and starts digging away at the dirt and suddenly realize that he's found a fortune.

When conflicts erupted in the Ancient Near East, there were no banks to put money in and so a lot of people buried their treasures in the ground and chances are good that this treasure has been there since even before the owner bought it.

And so now, this guy who's used to earning a dollar a day is face to face with a treasure trove of jewels worth more than anything he's ever seen.

And so he does the math.

Remember back in grade school – 'greater than, less than'? The shark wants the bigger thing? The shark wants the treasure! This man realizes that the treasure that he has before him is more valuable than the sum total of what he owns and so he decides to give up what he has to take hold of something even better.

You *could* say that this guy is sacrificing everything to get the treasure, but that's not really accurate, because in this guy's mind, he's not *losing* anything; he's actually *gaining* everything. The treasure is worth more than everything he has.

Same with the pearl merchant.ⁱ

He's out there, searching the world, looking for valuable pearls and all of a sudden he stumbles upon a pearl that is more beautiful, more lustrous, more breath-taking than anything he has ever seen.

Just like the guy in the field, he does the math. 'Here's what I have; here's what this is worth.' Which way does the shark go? The treasure is greater than everything he has put together and so he gives up what he has to take hold of something even greater.

By telling us these parables, Jesus is telling us that the Kingdom of Heaven is exceedingly valuable, worth far more than everything we have, worth far more than anything on earth.

Jesus is telling us that redemption from sin, relationship with God and the richness in eternal life is worth more than everything we have put together.

Well, if that's the case, what do we do to take hold of it? That's where the second part of our big idea comes in.

The Kingdom of Heaven is worth more than anything we have and worth giving everything we have to receive.

The Gospel of the Kingdom is worth giving up everything we have to receive.

That what happens in the parables, right?

The farmer says 'here's the treasure, here's what I own; it's going to take everything I have to take hold of the treasure but I'd be a fool not to because it's so valuable. I'm going to give up what I have to take hold of something even greater.'

Same with the pearl merchant. He says: "here's the treasure, here's what I own; it's going to take everything I have to take hold of the treasure but I'd be a fool not to because it's so valuable; I'm going to give up what I have to take hold of something even greater."

Same for us. By telling us these parables, Jesus is calling us to give up everything we have in order to take hold of something even greater. I think that Dale Bruner is onto something when he writes "The simple fact that Matthew repeats the formula 'sold all that he had' in 13:44 and 46 indicates the seriousness with which Matthew [expects] this activity taken."ⁱⁱ

But here's the thing. In the parable, the people sell everything they have to buy up the treasure. The farmer sells everything to gain the pearl. The pearl merchant sells everything to gain the pearl. Does that mean that we sell everything to gain the Kingdom?

Well, for some, like the rich young ruler, that IS what it takes. When financial gain stands in the way of depending on God for everything, yes, you need to get rid of it.

But I think that Jesus is talking about more than money here. He's talking about our values. He's talking about our priorities. He's talking about what gets first place in our lives and what it is that we are living for. Jesus is calling us to let go of everything we have in our hearts so we can take hold of the Kingdom with both hands.

And frankly, I think that Jesus is saying in parable form here what He says in 'straight up teaching' form in a few chapters – Matthew 16:24-25 –

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.
25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.

In the language of the parable, whoever gives up everything, gains everything and the one who holds on to what he has loses it all.

If the farmer had clung to what he had, he would have lost the treasure of a lifetime. He gave it up to gain it all. Same with the pearl merchant, if he had put his current situation before the potential treasure before him, he'd be looking at a net loss. But by giving it up, he gained it all.

Same for us. When we lay everything we have at Jesus' feet – our priorities, our pride, our possessions - when we get off the throne of our own lives to let Jesus be King – we gain everything in return. By giving it up, we gain it all.

And even then, I think that it would be a mistake to think about this in terms of 'sacrifice.' I mean, for one, we're not 'giving up everything' to earn relationship with God; we're not giving up everything to 'buy the kingdom;' we give up everything in grateful response to the fact that Jesus gave up everything for us.

He laid down His life to restore us to God. He forgave our sins and committed Himself to us forever, if we would only turn from ourselves to believe in Him and follow Him. There are actually people who think this parable is about JESUS giving up everything on the Cross to buy His people.ⁱⁱⁱ We are saved by grace not sacrifice.

Yes, we lay everything at His feet, for the benefit of His Kingdom, but not to earn His favour. We lay everything at His feet because we know that everything He gives us is worth more than anything we had before.

The Kingdom of Heaven is worth more than anything we have and worth giving everything we have to receive.

So that's the parable, what do we do about it?

Well, here I would say: 'Receive the Kingdom as a treasure and treasure it above all else.'

'Receive the Kingdom as a treasure and treasure it above all else.'

Let me unpack that real quick.

Receive the Kingdom as a treasure.

One of the questions that I wrestled with this week is why this parable appears HERE in the Gospel of Matthew. Or maybe better, why this parable appears HERE in Jesus' teaching.

This feels to me, as a guy who has been preaching for almost a decade, like the climax of a sermon, like the lead up to an altar call. This feels to me like Jesus is leading His audience to make a decision and that makes me think that Jesus is calling us to make a decision.

With this parable, Jesus is saying to us: 'Look at what you are living for. Look at the life that I am offering you, one of peace and purpose, of Jesus' presence with you now and the promise of eternal life in the future, and know that you're not going to get a better deal than that.' Which of these ways are you going to go?

Receive the Kingdom of God as a treasure. Invite Jesus in to take up residency in your heart. Recognize that what Jesus offers IS INDEED a treasure and get rid of or 'sell off' whatever you need to in order to receive the kingdom with open arms.

This is not a dreary 'sell off everything and give to the poor'; this is a 'you go into a store and find something on the shelf that you know is exceedingly valuable and you realize that they are giving it to you for WAY less than it's worth.'

Have you ever had that happen? I remember a few times, I've gone into a used bookstore only to discover there on the shelf is a book that is so important, so crucial to the flow of Christian thought thru the ages that it's worth millions in my mind and they're selling it for \$5. You feel like 'don't over react, keep it cool,' you carry it to the cash and think they're going to discover the mistake but no they sell it to you for that lesser price and then you get out into the parking lot and burst into song because you can't believe how fortunate you are to have it for yourself!

That's what it means to receive the kingdom of God as a treasure. Take hold of it by faith and give it pride of place in your heart. Remember that verse 44 says that that guy went 'with joy' to sell off what he had to gain the treasure, receive the Kingdom as a treasure with joy.

Now instinctively, I know that that's what Jesus is saying with these parables, but the fact remains that they are tucked in between a bunch of other parables. This wasn't the end of Jesus' sermon; He was just getting warmed up.

I think that this is a very subtle way to say – 'yes, receive the kingdom as a treasure, but go on to treasure it above all else.'

It can be so easy to grow up in the church and lose sight of just how value the Kingdom is.

Michael Wilkins says it well:

"Unfortunately, it is all too easy to lose sight of this value and so lose the joy. This is the danger of those who grow up in fine Christian homes and good churches but who take this for granted. If a person has always known the message, he or she may not really grasp the value of the gospel and the reality of the presence of the kingdom of God."^{iv}

In getting ready for today, I watched a couple of clips of the Antique Roadshow on YouTube. There's a bunch of people on that show who have NO IDEA what they have. They have some sense that what they have is valuable, but that have NO IDEA just how valuable it really is! The field owner in the parable – HE didn't know what HE had.

I don't want us to be like that, as Christians. I want you to know what you have as a follower of Jesus, as a citizen of the Kingdom and I want you to treasure it above all else.

Klyne Snodgrass is helpful here. He writes:

"All of life is a seeking after value... Our relation with God is the most important part of life. All our other pursuits are trivial by comparison. More specifically, understanding what God has done in Christ and following Christ are more valuable than all else we possess or seek. It is clear too that we cannot be focused on 'our things' and do justice to God's kingdom. God's call trumps all else in life – and it is worth it."^v

It being Thanksgiving, I know that a lot of people like to think about what they are thankful for; I'd encourage you this week, sit down and make a list of the things that you are thankful for. Let 'the Kingdom of God,' the treasure of knowing Jesus, top that list and consider how the other things on that list can be harnessed to further God's Kingdom.

Receive the Gospel as a treasure and treasure it above all else.

You know, if you've grown up with these parables it can be easy to gloss over their meaning so I thought I'd try reworking things to craft a parable of my own and I think that this gets at what Jesus is saying pretty well.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a family, living in a war-torn country, under constant threat of attack, who gives up all that they have to buy passage into a new nation with democratic ideals and the security of community and justice. They've given it all but gained it all.

Same with the Kingdom. We give up living in a kingdom ruled by the tyranny of money and of worry, to enter into the Kingdom where the king reigns with truth and justice and peace.

The Kingdom of God is worth more than anything we have and worth giving up everything we have to receive.

Receive the treasure and treasure it above all else.

ⁱ Pearls were some of the most luxurious and valuable jewels in the Ancient Near East (Grant Osborne, *Matthew*, 541).

ⁱⁱ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28*, 48.

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, John Walvoord, quoted in D. A. Carson, "Matthew," *Matthew-Mark* (Revised Expositor's Bible Commentary), Commentary on Matthew 13:45-46, OliveTree edition.

^{iv} Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew* (NIV Application Commentary: (p. 505). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

^v Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with intent 2nd ed.*, pg. 247.