

The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Value

Discovering God's Heart Through Jesus' Parables

Matthew 13:44-46

October 14, 2018

Call to Worship:

Hear this, all peoples! Give ear, all inhabitants of the world,² both low and high, rich and poor together!³ My mouth shall speak wisdom; the meditation of my heart shall be understanding...

⁵ Why should I fear in times of trouble, when the iniquity of those who cheat me surrounds me,⁶ those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches?⁷ Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life,⁸ for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice.

Psalm 49:1-3, 5-8 (ESV)

Scripture Reading:

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls,⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Matthew 13:44-46 (ESV)

Jesus began many of his parable with the words, "the kingdom of heaven is like." "The kingdom of heaven," described in other places as "the kingdom of God," or "the kingdom of Christ and God," or "His [Christ's] kingdom," is the place where Jesus Christ has full reign. It is the place where Jesus is king of kings and Lord of Lord. All who truly belong to the kingdom of heaven have formally yielded to Christ's Lordship. For those who belong to the kingdom of heaven Jesus is not only Savior, he is Lord. Jesus himself said that it is also not enough just to say he is Lord, he has to be your Lord. Towards the end of his *Sermon on the Mount* Jesus says, "Not everyone who calls me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

The will of God the Father and Jesus the Son are one in the same. The kingdom of heaven is both here and now and in the future. It is here today among Jesus' followers in an imperfect form, it will be in its perfect form, full completion, only when Jesus returns.

During the time period in which we find ourselves in, the time before Jesus' second coming there are two kingdoms – the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of this world. Jesus made that clear when said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). In fact as Jesus followers, our entire life as Christians, during our time here on earth is a battle trying to discern between kingdom of heaven activities and kingdom of this world activities. Who really is Lord of my life? Is it the nation I live in, or a political ideology or maybe a political party? Is it a flag and that which it represents? Is it money? Is it sports? Is it my job? Is it my family or friends? Is it technology? Is it FaceBook? Is it me!?

While on vacation in Florida a couple of weeks ago I read a history of the Amish/Mennonites in Ohio, from the time they came to Ohio in the 1800's through 1969. I was surprised by some of the similarities and some of the differences between our forefathers and our foremothers and us. Perhaps the biggest difference being the recognition of the existence of the two kingdoms. Until fairly recently most Mennonites would not have thought about aligning with a specific political party or voting on pretty much anything outside of the most local of decisions – such as township trustee or school board. They didn't serve in the military not only because their Savior and Lord Jesus Christ taught against the taking up of arms to defend oneself, but because the the military represented a kingdom of this world activity, along with voting, serving on a jury, working in a government position. There have always been the exceptions but that is where the clear majority were at.

Without the sense of the existence of two kingdoms, one spends his or her time operating in both, and while we might say, "Jesus is Lord," our actions are far from it. Hence we live in a nation that calls itself "a Christian nation," but doesn't look like Jesus at all, and that is true at both ends of the political spectrum.

You see, we the church, is and are supposed to represent God's kingdom, the kingdom of heaven during this time period. Some of the first words from Jesus' prayer that he taught his disciples to pray, also from his *Sermon on the Mount*, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). I've gotten so when I pray my Lord's prayer I pray, "your kingdom come, your will be done – first in me, then on earth, just as it is in heaven." It starts with me.

So, how much is the kingdom worth? Can you put a value on it? Does it cost?

I shiver every time I hear someone say "our salvation is free." No, our salvation is not free, it came at a great cost. In fact nothing in the universe, nothing in the kingdom here on earth could ever match the priceless value of the kingdom of heaven. It's worth more than any mortal human being could ever imagine – which means it is infinitely beyond the price range any of us could ever think to afford, even for the richest person in the world. The Bible is quite clear, from the very beginning to the end, no person can buy his or her way into the kingdom of heaven.

In fact, it actually works the other way. People who are rich in this kingdom's goods are severely disadvantaged from the perspective of the heavenly kingdom. Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24). The same applies to the ones who think they can work their way into the kingdom of heaven and the self-righteous.

Yes, it tells us in Ephesians 2:8 that our salvation is a gift from God which comes only through faith, but it certainly was not free and that is the main point of our two parables this morning. The two parables are so simple that each of them is contained in just one sentence. The first, the parable of the hidden treasure: "*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*"

As with many, if not most, of the other parables that Jesus gave, this parable should have not been that difficult for its first hearers to understand in light of their culture and context. For us today it is harder to understand. Perhaps a recent story might help:

In February of 2014 a couple in Northern California were walking their dog on their own property when they spotted something beginning to emerge from the dirt on one of the paths. When they started to dig it up they discovered that it was a metal can containing gold coins. As they dug further they discovered more metal cans filled with more gold coins. When they were finally done digging they had discovered more than 1400 coins total, dating from 1847 through 1894. When they took the coins to get them assessed they discovered their value to be more than \$10,000,000, one of the coins at more than \$1,000,000 by itself. It is believed to be the most valuable hidden treasure ever uncovered in the United States.

Hiding one's treasures is something that we have a hard time grasping in the 21st century. Today we have banks, stocks, bonds, real estate investments, and safe-deposit boxes. But in Jesus' day that was not the case. There were no safe places to store one's wealth or treasures. Those who were rich enough to have a surplus of coins, jewels, or other valuable treasure usually ended up burying it on their land. That was the safest place.

So here is a man who discovers a buried treasure in a field that belongs to someone else. Perhaps he was trespassing, or more likely he was employed by the landowner to work the field. Maybe it was when he was plowing that he unearthed the buried treasure. Immediately, he puts it back where he found it. Then he goes and sells everything he possesses in the world, liquidates all that he has, and buys the field in order that he may gain the treasure hidden in it. We are not told precisely what the treasure was – only that it was immensely valuable. Why else would he sell everything to buy the land?

Some might question the character of the man who discovered the hidden treasure. When he discovered it he re-hid it without telling the person who owned the field? Was there really ethical? Didn't he have a duty to report his finding to the landowner? Well, in that day he did not. As one would expect in that day, the Jewish law was very specific about such things. The Jewish law said that when an object of value whose owner was unknown was found outdoors (even just outside the threshold of the door), the owner had no necessary claim to it. It would have been assumed that once the landowner sold the land, if he didn't go and dig it up and take it with him, it was not his. No one forgets about a treasure that valuable. By Jewish law, the hidden treasure belonged to the finder.

The main point of the first parable is that the man found something so valuable that he was willing to give up everything else in order to get it. The second parable makes the same point:

⁴⁵ *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.*

This second person was a merchant, a dealer in fine pearls. In Jesus' day pearls were the equivalent of diamonds today. They were the most valuable of gems. One single pearl of perfection, size and beauty could be of such immense worth that it could trump many of the

others. This man found one of such immense worth that he went and sold all that he had in order to buy just that one. Apparently the one who already had the one of great value didn't recognize its worth.

The main point of the Parables of the Buried Treasure & the Fine Pearl: **Everything that this world deems worthwhile or important counts as sheer loss compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ and being part of His kingdom (eternal life).**

The apostle Paul put it best:

But whatever once I considered as gain to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.
Philippians 3:7-8 (NIV)

While the two parables make the same main point, there is one big difference between the two. In the first parable the man just stumbles upon the treasure. In the second parable the merchant is already seeking the fine pearl.

The two different parables represent the different ways individuals enter the kingdom of heaven. Some seem to come into the kingdom almost by accident; Others, being drawn, spend time considerable time seeking. But it is important to remember, as it said in our Scripture passage from last week, John 6, "no one can come to the kingdom, to Jesus Christ, unless drawn by the father."

"It is God who sovereignly ordains the discovery of Christ. He deals with all people as individuals, ordering the steps of each one in accord with His plan, graciously granting to sinful hearts the will and the wisdom to see and appreciate the infinite value of the kingdom, and thereby motivating them to esteem Christ greater than all the riches of the world. That is saving faith."
John MacArthur, *Parables*

So what exactly is the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value that Jesus is talking about? It is none other than Jesus himself, the kingdom of heaven, eternal life. The kingdom of heaven and eternal life are synonymous and the only way one gets there is through Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and life, no one comes to the Father, no one comes to the kingdom, to eternal life, except through me" (John 14:6).

Our problem today is that in such an affluent society and culture, not just in money but in things, choices, opportunities, distractions, it is almost impossible to grasp the value of the treasure and the pearl of great value. Hence, we are not really willing to give up all else in the kingdom of this world.

More evidence that we can't really grasp the value of the treasure that God offers us in Jesus Christ is our unwillingness to share the Good News about the treasure. I think if we really understood just how valuable the treasure or the pearl of great value is, there is no way we wouldn't share it with others. It would make no difference what our personality preferences

were, if we were introverted or extroverted, shy and having a hard time going out of our own comfort zones. If we really knew just how valuable the treasure is, we would work at finding ways to share it with the different personalities that God has given us to different people in different ways so that it would have the best chance of being received as the Good News that it is.

More evidence that we really don't understand the value of the treasure is the fact that we often confuse other things with the treasure itself. Our treasure becomes the things that we like, our own pet projects, our activities, our causes, our doctrine. For many Mennonites it has been things like music, or dress, or our peace position. Today for many it's social causes – and don't get me wrong here, there are lots of good things that we can be doing and should be doing – but we need to remember that they are not the prize, they are not the treasure, the pearl of great value.

There is only one treasure/one pearl of great value and that is Jesus Christ and the gift that he brings of eternal life, which although it starts here, it ends in the kingdom of heaven to come.

Everything else here wastes away, it's garbage! There are many among us today who are grieving the loss of a 16-year-old from our community who died in a tragic automobile accident last Sunday afternoon. For one among us he was his best friend. Our hope, our treasure, our pearl of great value has to be beyond our life here on earth – and that is what Jesus brings.