



“THE KINGDOM OF GOD: *What’s it worth?*” – Matthew 13:44-52

by *Pastor Tim Dodson*
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Matthew 13:44-52 *"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and*

hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, 46 "who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. 47 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, 48 "which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. 49 "So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, 50 "and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth." 51 Jesus said to them, "Have you understood all these things?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." 52 Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old."

Jesus has been expounding throughout Chapter 13 of Matthew, on the nature and character of the Kingdom of God. The parable of the soils tells us that in this kingdom there will be those who believe and there will be those who do not. In the second parable on the wheat and the tares, we find that the believers and the nonbelievers will exist side-by-side...and we will not really know who is a ‘wheat’ and who is a ‘weed’ until the ‘final harvest’ that comes in the end. Despite the fact that such evil and evil people live here amongst us, such does not mean they are actually a part of the kingdom but rather that they are dwelling here amongst the rule of God, even while openly rebelling against Him. Until the end, such folks will be the recipients of God’s ‘common grace’...from the air we breathe, to the food we eat, to the experiences we relish.

We know from the word’s of Christ that this kingdom will grow, albeit in an aberrant state, much of it in a corrupt and mutant form, and again we will not always know what and who is the real thing and what is the false on this side of eternity. It appears that the living that occurs in this kingdom realm is voluntary as far as our participation and dynamic. Thus there will be those who dabble, those who fully engage, and those who reject and ignore. As Jesus brings this subject matter to a close, He in finale seeks to express the value of this kingdom and our participation in it, despite these issues so far presented.

In our first picture we have a man who found a treasure in a field...a field that apparently was not his own. We are not told why the man was there or what he was doing. Likely he was working the field in some manner, and he comes across a treasure. Having found it, he returns it to its place and immediately goes out and sells everything he has and purchases the field.

Now before we get all judgmental on the guy in the field, we need to realize that what seems fairly conniving to us, was perfectly normal and legal to a Jew of that day. For according to Jewish law, it was permissible in that day for a man to take possession of what he found buried in the field of another. Technically, he could have pocketed the treasure and immediately walked off and he would have done no wrong and would have broken no laws. But something apparently stood in his way. Maybe the current owner of the field would have put a stop to that so the man took the only course of action that assured him of ownership, and that was to *buy the field*. There was an obvious commitment that had to take place. There would be no shortcuts...no “cheating the system.” Jesus tells us that, after finding this treasure and hiding it again, “*for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*”

Now these would be stories that may seem a little strange to us, but not to the listener in Christ's day. There were no banks in that day or at least in the form that we think of them today. And with constant pirates and military raids one had a precarious hold upon his or her valuables. So burying them in a place where one would plan to come back and later unearth, would be a common occurrence. All it would take would be the death of the one who hid the treasure and the treasure would be lost.

That aspect of the story may seem inconsequential, but it wasn't to the one who hid that treasure and planned to come back. Because many of the participants in the human race have done the same. They knew it was a treasure...they knew it was valuable and they had every intention of one day coming back and getting that treasure, but life got in the way. It happens so easily even today. "*I'll get back there...I'll get that treasure again.*" But like the man who hid his candle under a bushel, or the servant who buried his talent instead of using it to earn more for the master, or even the fella who plans to one day again make things right with God and return to the community of believers, the fact remains that a lot of people have had the best of intentions but in fact never made it back. Maybe they forgot where they put it. Maybe they just waited too long and death snuck up on them and took them out when he or she did not expect it.

But like often is the case, in the end, the treasure simply found its way to another. All because the original owner failed to grasp the value of it and God just got someone else. How often I see this happen! It's a mistake to think we can play 'loose and fast' with God's gifts or live lazy in His kingdom or try to dictate to God how his gifts are to be utilized. For many have been sidelined in lieu of another. And ultimately others went on to embrace and enjoy the gifts of the kingdom that God once had given us! Maybe it was our pride. Maybe it was the lack of adhering to His directions. Maybe we were inattentive. But the end was the same; *the treasure was lost.*

In the second account we have a similar picture wherein a pearl merchant found a pearl so perfect and so valuable that he also went out and sold everything *he* had in order to gain possession of this pearl! We need to understand that the pearl was the most valuable jewel in that day. They weren't cutting rubies and diamonds to the degree that we do so in our day, so if someone wanted bling it was most often pearls! So again, both of these accounts would be pictures that the listener would be able to easily grasp.

So what is there to glean herein? One, there is "treasure" out there if we are willing to seek it.

Christ is expressing both the value that quietly lies within this field even when such is not readily evident, and within a pearl that did not merely fall into his hands but had to be sought out. We see in both accounts that the 'treasure' was not found by accident. This was not a lucky lottery ticket. Each man had to exert some effort...he had to *seek* this treasure. The man may have "found" the treasure, but if he hadn't been working in the field he would not have found it, and it certainly called for some effort to gain possession of it! We hear the echo of such in Matthew 6:33 "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*"

And what is an overwhelming aspect of the story is that once found, the men went on to sell *everything they had* in order to gain possession of such a treasure! They did not try to just steal the treasure...for it would not have been theirs to take and would have only rendered them usurpers... fakers...thieves! Taking similar language about the kingdom living in John 10:1, Jesus tells us "*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.*" The 'treasure' that was to be gained, was worth the sacrifice of *everything else* to gain it! Is that how we look upon the kingdom of God? For what would we sell everything we own in order to acquire? What truly holds that kind of value for you today? Imagine what all these men gave up to gain this one treasure? Things which held historical and emotional attachment. All that which materially made up their lives up to that point. Everything up until they found the one thing that made everything else pale in comparison. The one thing that superseded all else.

There would have to be a clear understanding and a overt belief that every sacrifice and every pain would be worth it because what was being gained was worth far more than what they would be losing. In fact, you could truly say that the

man in Jesus' parable would have been a fool *not* to buy that land—even though it cost him everything to do so. And Jesus is telling us that the kingdom of heaven is just like that hidden treasure.

But we must also realize that this 'treasure' is even now "hidden" from this world. The people of our day don't look upon it as of any value. They are only concerned with what will advance them in their enjoyment of the things in this world—things that the Bible says are guaranteed to fade away and disappear. We tend to seek after what is easy to catch...what satisfies the immediate desire. The apostle John warned us; *"Do not love the world or the things in this world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."* (1 John 2:15-17).

In Matthew 19 we read of the account of the rich young ruler, and therein that man asked Jesus what he needed to do to be saved. He gave up a lot already...he had committed so much even by then...having kept the law all of his life and living a life of piety. And yet he still knew something was missing...something was wrong.. "What do I still lack?" he asked. Jesus told him, *"If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."* But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (Matthew 19:21-22).

This man was a complete contrast to the man in Jesus' parable! For He was quite unwilling to sell all that **he** had "for joy" over Jesus' offer. In fact, he went away sorrowful, because it all cost more than he was willing to pay! And it's not that we are actually buying our ticket, for this is a gift that is free. But to say it doesn't cost us is simply erroneous and perhaps that is why some begin this journey and fail to finish? Because they thought they could keep their life and have the kingdom too? Because they thought salvation was an *addition to* instead of a *replacement for*? Or that Jesus was simply an *enhancement* to their present lives, when to own such one must "part with everything that he or she has" to possess such? In Luke 14:33 he calls us out: *"So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."* The NLT says it so clearly: *"...you cannot become my disciple without giving up everything you own."*

Hmmm...that's a tune we don't hear very often. Seldom do we hear that preached! Rare is that the 'verse of the day!' Yet it is a succinct and emphatic truth spelled out there on the pages of the Word of God. I'm afraid that so many of us fail to grasp the value...fail to see the profit...fail to understand the cost. We don't really understand the magnitude of the gospel. The staggering ramifications of the cross of Christ. We know it has something to do with heaven and eternity, and nobody wants to do that hell thing if there really is such a place. So I better 'get on board' with this Jesus thing and hedge my bet a little! But that's a bust...it means nothing and gains us nothing! And because we don't grasp the value of this treasure in *this life* as well as the *life hereafter*, we fall to the flesh, we fall to sin, we struggle to let go and strive to keep moving ahead.

We *want* to agree with these accounts in Matthew 13. We want to say "amen." But the fact is so many of us are yet to be so persuaded. Many of us are still doubtful. And we therefore cling to certain pet elements and aspects of this world...white-knuckled and gritting our teeth. Every sacrifice we make leaves us a little bitter, and every cost we incur in the walk of faith is more painful than the one before that. Then we struggle. We want the old stuff back and miss our old lives. All because we fail to grasp or fail to realize the value of what we have in this treasure before us. Why? How does that happen? Is this an issue of mind over matter? What's the problem here?

In the last of the kingdom parables, Jesus 'cuts to the chase.' We live in the Midwest...next door to the land of 10,000 lakes but we have plenty of our own too. So wisconsinites tend to know how to fish! So did the listeners to Jesus' parables herein. But for the most part, they fished little different and if you know your bible, you're probably familiar with how they fished in that day. There was the time that the Jesus preached from Peter's fishing boat. After He was finished, He told Peter to let down his net for a catch. And when Peter and his co-workers did so, the Gospels record that, *"they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help*

them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.” (Luke 5:6-7). And then again after Jesus had risen from the dead, when He stood on the shore and called to Peter to cast his net out at a certain spot. When they did, *“they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish”* (John 21:6). So fishing in that day tended to be not for sport or entertainment, but for survival and as part of their very living.

For the idea was to catch as many fish as possible, and they did so not with a pole and line, but with a net. But the problem with net fishing is that, along with the good and valuable, you get the junk fish...the inevitable ‘weeds’ of the last parable. When I was a kid, we would occasionally catch a carp. Now they put up a good fight and they were fun to catch, but you couldn’t eat them because carp was just full of bones. Certainly we have spiritually caught a few carp over the years. They were with us in the catch, but they failed the test and ultimately did not endure the kingdom race.

When you fish with a net, you are going to get some fish that are not any good to anyone and they are tossed out when the ‘separating’ occurs. And rest assured, the ‘separating’ is going to occur! Jesus says that the *“...the good will be gathered together and the bad would be cast away.”* He went on to say that this will occur at *“...the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”* We must realize that to be found in the net with a bunch of other fish...what we would see as church and community...doesn’t matter if you are not truly one of his! Many will go through the motions of church attendance and religious participation, but will still not truly be one of His. We can even teach bible studies and go on mission trips and be baptized, and in the end be lost for all of eternity because we were never really born again. Jesus was never really your Lord.

Where do you stand today, and how do you know? Is there bitterness and rebellion in your life? Anger and animosity is found within you, a divided heart remains, and transgression an active issue? The apostle Paul gave this word of warning once to a church full of professing Christians...he said *“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.”* (2 Corinthians 13:5).

We must not ignore that word of warning. We must...if we desire to be a real part of Him, take it very seriously! Examine yourself as if that self-examination was the most important thing you could possibly do. Your eternal destiny depends upon making it certain. Is Jesus Christ truly in you? Do you have an ongoing, growing relationship with Him? Do you demonstrate the clear, unmistakable evidence of a transformed life—the kind of transformed life that proves that He dwells in you?

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’ Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:31-46).