

What Is It Worth?

Matthew 13:44-46

OPEN: A lot of folks in this church like baseball. I wonder if you ever heard this baseball story?

Back in 1905, there was baseball game at Salt Lake City, Utah. The Rhyolites were playing the Beattys and the Beattys were up to bat. The pitcher threw the ball, the batter swung - and the ball rocketed toward 1st base.

The 1st baseman was a man named William Griffiths, and as he saw the ball coming his way, he was amazed to see it ricochet off a small stone and land right in his glove. He beat the runner to first easily.

The little stone had given Griffiths a lucky break, but he decided it had no business on the playing field, so he walked over and picked it up. He started to raise his hand to throw it off the field when something caught his eye. He took a careful look at the stone and recognized free gold in it. Then he quietly slipped it into his pocket and went on with the game.

That evening, he returned to the ball park with a lantern and spent an hour scratching around in the soil until he had accumulated a bucketful of rocks. By morning he knew that those rocks assayed at more than \$900 a ton.

He called in two friends and with them quietly bought the ball park.

The mine was called the First Base Mine, and the first shaft entered paying ore at a depth of 33 feet. And Infielder Griffiths soon found himself a very wealthy man. (*The Saturday Evening Post July/Aug 2000 H. Allen Smith and Ira L. Smith*)

Imagine how you would feel if you found a treasure like that. What would you do? We have been studying Matthew 13 and the parables, or stories, that Jesus told about the Kingdom of heaven. Today we look at two very short ones, the Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Parable of the Priceless Pearl. Here Jesus teaches us about the value of the Kingdom.

I. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure (v. 44).

A. The Kingdom of heaven is like a "**Treasure Hidden in a Field.**"

Burying your valuables in the ground sounds strange to us, but it was a very common practice in the first century. Today we usually put our money in a bank. We keep our valuables in a safe deposit box. But, back in those days, there were no banks for the common people. If a man had something very valuable like money or gems, he might put it in an earthen pot or a wooden box and bury it.

This was especially true in Palestine because it was a place of frequent warfare. Burying valuables protected them against any enemies who might raid the land and try to steal everything.

Remember in Matthew 25, Jesus told a story about a master who gave some talents to his servants. A talent was a measure of money. The first servant was given five talents, the second was given two talents, the third was given one talent. The first two invested those amounts and multiplied their master's money. But the third servant was worried. He didn't want anything to happen to that money. He wanted to keep it safe, so what did he do? He buried it in the ground. That's what people did.

When the owner of a buried treasure died or was forcefully driven from the land (like during the Babylonian exile), his treasure would be lost forever unless someone discovered it. So, in those days, it wasn't uncommon at all for a person who was plowing or digging in a field to accidentally come across a treasure. And that's what Jesus says happened here.

Because the field does not belong to the man, he **"goes and sells all he has and buys that field."**

Now, there is a concern that people sometimes have about this parable. At first glance, the man in the parable seems to be dishonest. Honest behavior would demand that this man tell the owner of the field about the treasure, since it was on his property and rightfully belonged to him. Right? Not necessarily.

Jewish rabbinic law said that "if a man finds scattered fruit or money, it belongs to the finder." So the people listening to the parable would not have perceived the man's actions as unethical at all. In fact, the man had a right to what he found. If a man came across money or valuables that were obviously lost and whose owner was dead or unknown, the finder had a right to keep what was found -- even if it was found on someone else's property!

It's obvious that the treasure didn't belong to the man who owned the field. If it did, then he would have dug up the treasure before he sold the piece of ground. But he didn't know it was there. Apparently it had belonged to a previous owner, who had probably died in battle or by accident, which prevented him from recovering it.

So, really, the man who found the treasure was extremely honest. He didn't have to buy the field. He could have just taken the treasure. But he doesn't. He buys the field. In fact, he didn't even use the treasure to provide him enough money to make the purchase. Instead, he liquidated everything he owned to come up with the money. So the man didn't do anything unethical.

But we need to be careful not to lose sight of the main point of the parable which is this: A man found something so valuable that he sold everything he had to possess it. He was so excited about finding the treasure that he was willing to do whatever he had to do in order to have it.

The treasure that he found was worth more than everything else that he owned. He was willing to give up all his worldly possessions for this special "treasure."

Well, that's the first parable, the second is similar.

II. The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price (vv. 45-46).

A. "Again" Jesus says, the Kingdom of heaven is like a **"Merchant Seeking Beautiful Pearls"** (v. 45).

A **"merchant"** [emporos] was a wholesale dealer whose business was to buy and sell merchandise for profit. He would travel far and wide to buy exotic materials and then sell them at higher prices in areas where they were rare.

This particular merchant Jesus mentions is one who traveled **"seeking pearls."** They were his specialty. He would travel the coastal regions where pearls were harvested and haggle with the divers and their employers for their finds.

"**Pearls**" were one of the most highly valued gems of the ancient world. Often they were purchased as investments. With a costly gem such as a pearl, a large investment could be hidden in a small place.

In Mat.7:6, Jesus told His disciples not to "**cast your pearls before swine.**" He meant that we are not to waste our time giving something so precious and priceless as the gospel to those critics who only want to trample its truths under their feet and tear down those who give it to them.

In Rev. 21:21, John describes the city of New Jerusalem as so beautiful that each of its twelve gates "**was of one pearl.**" The point is, in the minds of Jesus' audience, there was nothing so valuable as a pearl.

B. When a Merchant found such a Valuable Pearl, he would sell all to Own It (v. 46).

The "**merchant**" in Jesus' parable came across "**one pearl**" of such a "**great price**" that he simply had to have it. He considered this pearl not only worth more than all his other pearls put together, but more than all he owned.

Like the man who found the treasure in the field, he gladly gave up all his worldly possessions in order to buy this "**one pearl**" of priceless value.

III. The Meaning of the Parables

So what point is Jesus making with these two word pictures?

Some have interpreted these parables to say that Jesus is the man who found the treasure and the merchant who bought the priceless pearl. They see the treasure as the nation of Israel and the pearl as the church. Jesus finds this of such great value that He purchases them out of the world. This interpretation stresses the fact that we cannot purchase our own salvation and there is nothing we can give in exchange for eternal life. True enough. We cannot purchase the Kingdom of heaven. Of course that is right. Jesus is the one who paid the price for our salvation with His own blood. He is the one who gave everything, even His very life, so that we could be a part of the kingdom of God. To us, salvation is a free gift that we receive by faith in Jesus Christ. This is a foundational Biblical truth.

Although that point is true, I don't think that it is the main point of these parables. The problem with that interpretation is that the point of these parables is not *how we come into* the Kingdom of God, but *how valuable* is the Kingdom of God. The main point of these two parables is the superlative worth of the Kingdom of heaven. So the first truth we need to get a grip on today is this:

A. The Kingdom of Heaven Is Priceless.

The kingdom of heaven is worth infinitely more than anything else in this world.

In Matthew 16:26, Jesus used the image of a pair of scales when he asked the question, "**For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?**" Pile up everything in this world on one side and put the kingdom of God on the other side and it still comes out lopsided. The salvation of our souls is worth so much more. That's what Jesus wants you to understand in these two parables about the kingdom. Imagine how excited you would be if you were digging out in your

garden and you found a diamond bigger than the Hope Diamond. Christ and his kingdom are treasures beyond comparison.

Of course I cannot buy the Kingdom of Heaven, and neither can you or anyone else. The Kingdom of Heaven is far more valuable than anything in this world. Nothing we have could purchase it. I can't earn it with my good works. I can't buy it with my tithes and offerings. I can't even give my own life to purchase it. Jesus Christ purchased it for me with His blood on the cross. And He gives it to me by His grace. Think about it. You don't earn a gift. You can't buy a gift from someone. It is free, that's what a gift is. I receive God's free gift of eternal life by faith. Ephesians 2:8 says, **"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."**

So although I cannot buy salvation, once I have received the gift, I find that it is worth so much that everything else in this world pales in comparison. I think maybe that is what Jesus was talking about in **Luke 14** when He describes the cost of discipleship:

26 **"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.**

27 **"And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.**

28 **"For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it;**

29 **"lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,**

30 **"saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'**

31 **"Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?**

32 **"Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.**

33 **"So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.**

Jesus makes it sound pretty tough doesn't He? Jesus makes it sound like being His disciple will cost you everything: **"Father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters,"** your **"own life."**

One of the main characteristics of the true disciple of Jesus is that the disciple values Jesus and His kingdom above all else. Every other thing in this world, even the relationships with our family, cannot compare to having a relationship with Jesus. Those who are disciples of Jesus have such a love for Him and value Him so much that they are willing to part with anything and everything in this world. There is no cost so great that it could compare with the love of God shown to us at the cross when Jesus died for us.

So many people get this backwards. I have talked with many people who refuse to come to Jesus because they think they are going to have to give up too much to be a Christian. Listen, we do not forsake all that we have to become a disciple;

we forsake all that we have because we are His disciples. We do not take up our cross and follow Jesus to become disciples, we do that because we are disciples.

Sometimes we get it so wrong. We talk about all the sacrifices we have to make for Jesus. Here's what we all need to see. In this parable there's no sacrifice at all. Jesus said, **"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 the field."**

So here is the second truth we need to apply today:

B. The Kingdom of Heaven Brings True Joy.

How is it possible for someone to give up everything they possess with gladness and joy? What would it mean for you to get rid of everything you own? Dump the cars, the furniture, the boat, the entertainment center, the motorcycle, the jewelry and the big-screen. Empty the bank accounts. How would it feel? Would the day you lost it all be a happy day? Would you laugh? You sure would! You would, that is, if you knew that what you were about to receive was of far greater value than what you gave up.

Let me put it like this. Let's say you own a beat-up old 1972 Ford Pinto. You're constantly having to repair it. It breaks down practically every day. It rattles and clunks and sputters and shakes when you drive it. Now suppose I offered to trade you that old clunker for a brand new Lincoln Mark 8? Would you think you were sacrificing anything to make that trade? No, you'd be overjoyed!

Listen to what Jesus is telling us here. The kingdom of heaven isn't about losing or ending up with the short end of the stick. The kingdom of heaven is about making a killer deal. It's about the best trade you'll ever make. The kingdom of heaven is about trading hell for heaven. It's about trading death for life. It's about trading temporary trinkets for eternal riches. It's about trading bondage for freedom. It's about trading shame for joy. It's about trading rejection for acceptance. It's about trading guilt for forgiveness. It's about trading your fear and emptiness for the love that never disappoints. The kingdom of heaven is the infinite treasure. The kingdom of heaven is the pearl of great price. The Kingdom of heaven is the source of true joy.

Jesus says that the man in the first parable sold all he had in order to buy the field **"for the joy of it."**

As human beings we spend our lives on a quest for joy. We may find temporary joy in a new possession or new relationship, but the only lasting joy we can find is in Jesus and His Kingdom!

In John 15, when Jesus has given His discourse about the vine and the branches, He adds, "John 15:11 **"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."** If you claim to know Christ, but still seek for joy in temporary things, ask yourself if you truly know Him.

Here's the third truth:

C. The Kingdom of Heaven is worth my everything.

Why is the kingdom worth my everything? Because it's Jesus' Kingdom. He is the king and everything belongs to Him. Listen to what the Bible says about the Kingdom. **The Kingdom is:**

1. A refuge from the power of darkness.

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, (Col 1:13 NKJV)

2. A domain of righteousness, peace, and joy.

for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rom 14:17 NKJV)

3. An unshakable kingdom.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. (Heb 12:28 NKJV)

4. A destiny of eternal glory.

Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. (1 Cor 15:24 NKJV)

"Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Mat 13:43 NKJV)

Jim Eliot , a Christian missionary who was killed in South America in the 1950's said: "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose"

Listen to the testimony of the apostle Paul in Philippians 3:

7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

Isaac Watts' put it this way in his great hymn:

"When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride."