

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

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[0 : 00] If you would take your Bible and open it to Matthew chapter 13, you'll find this on page 819 of the pew Bible in front of you.

Matthew 13, and we will just be reading a couple of verses, starting at verse 44. 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. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who on finding one pearl of great value went and sold all that he had and bought it.

These are the words of Jesus, and may God bless the reading of his words and give us understanding. It's perhaps an understatement to say that Jesus was the greatest teacher to ever walk the face of the earth.

Everything that Jesus said had substance. Everything that Jesus did had purpose. He was, of course, the Son of God. He was God incarnate, that is God in the flesh.

[1 : 33] And therefore everything that he teaches commands our attention. When he spoke, we find that he did speak, as was common at the time, as the rabbis generally did, in short sayings, in responses to questions, and of course in parables.

But unlike the teachers of his day, his parables were not simply an exposition or an illustration of that which they already had in scriptures, the Old Testament scriptures.

They revealed new truths about the kingdom of God. Now if we go back in Matthew to the first great discourse, which we call the Sermon on the Mount, we find that the reaction of the crowd still rings true.

Today in Matthew chapter 7 verse 28 it says this, And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority and not as the scribes.

So a key element of his teaching is, of course, the fact that he did so with authority, but that he was teaching about the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. So John the Baptist, of course, heralded the kingdom of heaven, and he said that it was at hand, and that it was a turning point in history.

[2 : 55] And Jesus tells us the kingdom of heaven has arrived. The Messiah is here. And if you were to go back to Matthew chapter 11, you'll see that John the Baptist asked quite an interesting question, something that is quite unusual and maybe unexpected.

John the Baptist asks, you know, are you really the Messiah? He wants to know, is Jesus the Messiah? Has the kingdom of God come?

And Jesus answers John this way, or his disciples. He says, Go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk. Lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up.

And the poor have the good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me. What he's saying is that all the miracles that he performed demonstrate the reality that the kingdom of heaven was here.

Because the Messiah was here. The king was here. Jesus was here. So, as we go on to Matthew chapter 13, Jesus is teaching in parables.

[4 : 02] And he is telling what we would call kingdom parables, that teach us about the nature of the new kingdom. And so, we want to first ask the question, what is a parable?

It's simply just a comparison or a narrative story that tells one central point. Think of a parable like throwing an object. If you remember projectile motion from school, what path does an object follow when you throw it?

A parabola. It's from the same root word. So, when you think about a parable, think about like a story that is thrown alongside the other teaching of Jesus to make the point.

And so, just by way of introduction, I want to give four brief reasons that Jesus uses parables. The first is to reveal, if you go back to chapter 13, verse 10, it says, the disciples came to him and said, why do you speak to them in parables?

And he answered them and he said, to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. So, what he is saying is that parables are a way in which we can get deeper understanding to the teaching of Jesus, to those who already have faith.

[5 : 13] To you it has been given. But if we look on the other side of the coin, we can see that not only is it to reveal, but also to conceal. If we continue on, it says, but to them it has not been given.

For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

And he goes on to quote Isaiah, that this is a fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah. And so what he is saying is that this is a way to conceal the truth, which is perhaps an unusual thing.

But you need to remember that the opposition to Jesus at this point is beginning to build. And if Jesus was to come out and teach many of the things that he teaches in parables explicitly, those things which are obscured, you might find that they might have prematurely seized Jesus before his hour had come.

This concealment is part of God's way of ensuring that the plan of salvation is fulfilled. But it is also a form of judgment, because naturally none of us want to hear about God.

[6 : 26] By nature, none of us want to receive the things of God. And so for those who cannot do, who do not have ears to hear, for those who want nothing to do with God, it is a form of judgment.

Thirdly, it's a way to provoke a response. Many of the parables invite you to participate in the narrative by telling you stories that you can relate to.

Or they might have a radical twist. Think of the parable of the Good Samaritan, which has the religious leaders walking on past the man in need, while the Samaritan is the hero of the story.

The parable leaves you forced to make a response. It's not simply a platitude or a dull philosophical saying. It provokes a response. And lastly, what parables do is they show this present and future reality.

It shows how the kingdom of heaven is now and not yet. If you think about the parable of the tares, it shows you how even within the church, when the kingdom of God is here, there is both unbelief and belief, that there is rejection and there is acceptance, that you have this reality of the now and the not yet here in the church.

[7 : 39] So those are the four reasons that I think we can say why Jesus uses parables. So if we turn to our text in verse 44, we're going to just take these two short parables together.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure. Now, it wasn't uncommon in the turbulent Israel of the day where they're facing revolution and lawlessness to bury their valuables in the ground.

So we have a man who's perhaps working in a field and he unexpectedly stumbles upon treasure. And finding the treasure, he covers it back up and then in his joy, he goes back and he sees this treasure as being far more worth than anything else that he owns.

And so he sells everything to buy that field. So as we said before, parables have one main point. What is the main point here? The point here is that Jesus is worth more than any sacrifice.

Jesus is the treasure, the treasure that surpasses the worth of anything else that you value. You see, the kingdom of heaven is not a place.

[8 : 59] The kingdom of heaven is about the reign of King Jesus. And this king doesn't come to make demands of you to earn his favour. However, this king isn't expected to be served, but he comes to serve.

This king, he doesn't live in the palace. He has nowhere to rest his head. This king is perfect, and yet he is numbered with the transgressors. This king is the one who gives his life for his servants. It is his reign, and Jesus is the treasure. I want to just say as an aside that the main point of this parable is not that the kingdom of heaven can be bought.

That's not the point of the parable, and the reason we know this is because that would contradict everything else that we know about the kingdom of heaven. And the point is that we should want Jesus more than anything else that you desire.

So if we tie this in with the next parable, in verse 45, and again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

[10:08] It's clear that Jesus wants us to understand these parables together, and so we start with what are the similarities. Both have a man who has discovered something of immeasurable value.

Both sell all in order to obtain it. In this parable, the man is a merchant who is diligently searching for fine pearls, and he discovers the finest of all pearls.

He doesn't merely stumble upon it. He went out and he was looking for it. And when he found it, every other pearl that he owned, everything else that he owned, his home, all his possessions, all his wealth, were sold to buy this one pearl of great price.

Now, in the ancient world, pearls were valued at more than even gold, and so perhaps there is no finer thing that Jesus could have used to illustrate the point.

In the first, Christ is the treasure. In the second, Christ is the pearl of great value. So when we take these parables together, we should see that in Jesus, we have everything that we need.

[11:17] That in him, we have grace. In him, we have peace. We have forgiveness. We have hope. We have life. And we have love. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like treasure.

Jesus is worth more than any sacrifice. What is your goal in life? What do you aim to achieve? What do you treasure? What relationship do you have or would hope to have? Or what material possession do you wish you had enough money to buy or experience to have?

That if only I had that one thing, then I would be satisfied. If only this need could be met, then I would be truly happy. When the world looks at Jesus, when they look at Christianity, they're like the man who stumbles upon a field, but all they see is a field.

A field that may be green in places, a barren in others. And it's a field like any other field.

Christianity is just like all the other religions. Is that how you feel?

[12:21] Does being a Christian repress you? Does being a Christian prevent you from fulfilling your true needs? Is Jesus worth giving up in order to pursue something else that you treasure?

Perhaps this is something that is a great temptation for those who've grown up in the church, young people who've grown up in the church. They see the many things that the world has to offer, and that they see this as treasure, and they give up Jesus because that is more valuable to them.

So Jesus is cast aside, and they relentlessly pursue another. But when the man in this parable digs, he finds treasure.

When the merchant is seeking for pearls, he finds one pearl of great value, and he disregards all other treasures.

Do you see Jesus as treasure? Treasure worth sacrificing all to obtain, and to do so with joy.

[13:27] And this is the mark of true Christianity, that you disregard all other treasures, and pursue Jesus with passion. And as Colin said a couple of weeks ago, true satisfaction is found not in serving ourselves, but in serving God.

And as Patricia read to us these verses, whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Now, if we begin to apply this parable in another way, we also see that one of the truths that this parable communicates is that we all have a different story about how we came to Jesus.

We are all human. We are all individuals. We all have different experiences. And what we really need to do is we need to go to the Bible and see all the ways that God deals with people.

And we can see the many examples that we have. Here in the one, the man accidentally discovers the treasure. And maybe that was you. Maybe you weren't particularly interested in religion or Jesus.

[14:41] And suddenly God comes into your life through an experience or a person or a circumstance, and you're faced with a decision. And we can think about the testimony of Matthew himself.

Here Matthew is doing a normal day's work. He's sitting in his tax-collecting booth, and Jesus walks by and calls him. He didn't leave home that day looking for truth or expecting anything, yet Jesus steps into his life, calls him, and it changes his life forever.

Perhaps that was you. The next man, it's a bit different. He is diligently seeking fine pearls. He is a man seeking truth. Now when I think of this man, this makes me think of the story of Nabeel Qureshi, who I don't know, some of you may know him.

He was raised in a loving Muslim home with a family dedicated to practicing Islam, and he spent much of his childhood going to the Ahmadiyya Mosque just down in Finiston. And in his autobiography, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, he talks about the alluring, mystical beauty of Islam that faced him his whole life, something that we don't really understand in the West.

He speaks of seeing his parents' dedication to their faith, their dependence on their faith for everyday life, of how it saw them through difficulty, of how they got renewed their strength.

[16:03] And he had no doubts that Islam was true, and he was always learning how could he be a better Muslim. It wasn't until he encountered a Christian roommate when he was at university that he began to ask questions about Jesus, and after he was being challenged by that roommate.

And he recalls looking at the arguments for the death of Jesus on the cross, for the resurrection of Jesus, for the reliability of the Bible, for the deity of Jesus, and the case simply became overwhelming.

I don't have time to go into these arguments, but we can talk about them if we're over a cup of tea afterwards. You see, he had to keep searching, and he was looking to find out ways, or looking to find out what the truth really was.

And now, the important thing is that the arguments that he engaged with didn't make him a Christian, because Christianity is not simply a conclusion along a long list of arguments.

Christianity is intellectually defensible, it's robust, but faith is not simply intellectual assent. What the arguments did was tear down the barriers that prevented him from becoming a Christian that had been in place his whole life, the things that he'd been taught as a Muslim about Christianity, about Jesus.

[17:24] These things are what really prevented him from coming to God. And part of our work in evangelism is simply breaking down these barriers. And it not only applies to apologetic arguments, but it applies to many of the ministries that we engage in as a church.

You know, one of the barriers that people face is simply crossing the threshold into the church, or the fact that they don't know any Christians. relational evangelism, which Nabil experienced, is so important.

It's when we're friends with someone that we can actually speak into someone's life, because you've got to think about the fact that, you know, would you trust a stranger to tell you about things that are so important?

You know, our task is to engage with people and to love them. This makes me think of the verse that we read recently when Colm was going through 2 Corinthians, where it says, For we live in the world, we do not engage, for, sorry, for though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

[18:42] Tearing down strongholds. And now when it came to Nabil, once those barriers had been torn down, he had a decision to make. Was he to cast himself before the mercy of God and accept Jesus as his Lord and Saviour?

And that was the decision that he made. It took three years of discussions with several Christians and diligently seeking the truth before he made that decision to follow Jesus.

And just like the merchant, it cost him everything. This was in his mind during those three years, and perhaps not explicitly, it wasn't only the intellectual arguments that held him back from Jesus, it was the cost of that decision.

The decision to leave Islam devastated his family, particularly his parents. He spoke of how every time he saw his mother for months afterwards, he just cried every time she saw him. And he knew that this was going to happen.

But he treasured Jesus more than his own family. He knew what it meant to value Jesus more than anything else. Again, whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

[19:55] So when we look at this parable, we have another implication. It tells us what faith is all about. You see, Jesus gives us a picture of what faith is.

So we can really see this in terms of our Christian assurance. How do you know that you're a Christian? What is authentic saving faith? You see, in this parable, the man, when he finds the treasure, he recognizes it as treasure.

He wants it. He needs it. He can't live without it. He's willing to give up everything else for it. He values it above all else. Now, people can be driven to doubt whether or not they're truly a Christian because we overcomplicate faith.

We often make it something that it isn't. We often make it something deep, unattainable, and difficult. Christians can be robbed of their assurance, of their confidence, because it's overcomplicated.

And then when it's overcomplicated, the doubts come in, fears prevail, and it prevents them from being useful in God's kingdom. And they say, oh, well, I can't serve because I'm not worthy to serve.

[21 : 07] But when the New Testament talks about faith, it talks about believing, it talks about trusting, it talks about looking, it talks about receiving, which means if you are like the man in this parable who wants the treasure, that you are someone who has an appetite for Jesus, then you have it.

You have faith. When you value Jesus as your greatest treasure, that you accept that he's God's way, that there is life in him, life sufficient for you, and you lay hold of him, that's what it means to receive Christ, to believe on him, that you want him, to believe on him.

Think of the words that Jesus himself said, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. How do you know that you're a Christian? Do you see Jesus as your treasure?

Treasure above all treasures. Now, there are many reasons that genuine Christians doubt their salvation. Perhaps it's ongoing sin in their life. Well, if it's ongoing sin, if it's sin that grieves you, if you want rid of it, then you can just look at the examples in the Bible where you see that the Bible is full of people who make mistakes, of people who are messing things up.

So take courage that you're not alone. Another reason is that you lack fellowship with God. Well, in this case, it might not be anything to do with your identity as a Christian, but it could simply be because you don't take advantage of those means by which God has given you.

[22 : 47] You don't make time for God. You don't pray in your closet or join with others in prayer. The reasons that you lack intimacy with God is you just don't spend time with God.

And it's not because you're not a child with God. It's just a behavior issue. So if you want assurance, you should draw close to God because we all grow little by little as we draw closer to God.

So when you listen to what Jesus says about faith, you should see that it's actually quite simple. Do you want him? Do you look to him for your salvation?

Being aware of your own sin and inadequacy shouldn't make you run away from Jesus. It should draw you to Jesus. Lacking fellowship with him should not make you tiptoe away in fear and shame, but it should make you want to know him more.

So to bring our time together to a close, Jesus is the greatest treasure. And he was the greatest teacher. He says that the kingdom of heaven is treasure.

[23 : 55] We should see that from this parable, the mark of true Christianity is this, that you disregard all other desires and pursue Jesus with passion. That Jesus is worth more than any sacrifice.

That you, like the man, can have joy in Christ because you can see who he is and what he's done for you. And we should see that faith is not overcomplicated.

That assurance of salvation can be attained because the only qualification is this, do you have an appetite for Jesus? And so that leaves us with just one question.

What do you treasure? Amen. May God bless his word to us.