

Seeking Treasure, Finding Jesus

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Hope everyone's going okay on this fresh, cold morning. Thanks to the Musos too, doing a wonderful job today, and to Leigh for the Bible reading and Ian for the kids' talk.

Now you must be thinking, three verses, this is going to be a short sermon. We'll see how we go. First, we'll just start by praying together and then we'll get into it, hey? So pray with me. Father God, yeah, we just come before you, mighty God, holy God, thinking today about the ultimate treasure we can have in this world.

And Father, we just ask today that you would show us our hearts, show us what motivates us, show us what we truly long for, and Lord, may we never be the same again as we hold on to the ultimate treasure in your name.

Amen. Okay. Well, I want to start by asking you, what gets you going in the morning? What gets you out of bed?

[1 : 08] Is it a good cup of coffee? I'm sure that can help. Or is it a two or three-year-old of yours jolting you out of your sleep coma? It didn't happen to me this morning, it's happened other days.

Or do you just get out of bed because you've got to get moving for that deadline that's about to happen, getting ready for work, whatever that might be? Well, today I want to introduce you to two men that never started the day quite the same again when something jolted their reality so much it changed them forever.

These two men make their introduction in two of Jesus' shortest but most powerful parables. In the first parable, we have the story of the treasure.

We find a man who is likely a labourer who stumbles across a hidden treasure beyond all measure hidden in a field. And it changes him immediately.

He doesn't want to lose this life-changing treasure, so he goes and sells all he has so he can obtain it, so he can get this wonderful treasure. The second story of the pearls is actually nearly identical.

[2 : 20] The difference is we have a merchant, not a labourer. The merchant came from better means in those days and had more money and more things in his possession.

And this merchant is already searching for pearls or for treasure. And then he too, he comes across this pearl of immense value. So the labourer finds the treasure by accident, almost stumbling across it.

And the other man, the merchant, has been searching possibly his whole life and he finds this ultimate treasure in a pearl of great value. Both men come to the same conclusion.

It's this. Nothing that they have is anywhere near close to the value of the treasure and the pearl they found. So they let go of literally all they have for the treasure that they see of far greater value. As we've heard in previous weeks in the sermons on the parables, most parables tend to hinge around one key point.

[3 : 24] And Jesus in these brief parables makes this point very clear. There is a great treasure beyond anything of value these men have. And it's very clear it changes both of them immediately.

They will never be the same again. Their outlook changes to simply want to pursue that treasure that they found that's beyond all comparison. So they're never going to wake up quite the same again after finding it.

So we need to start, I think, by looking at who are these men and what is this treasure? What is this treasure of all treasures? Unlike some of the previous parables, we aren't given an interpretation to go along with.

But as it turns out, we have some good company in the Bible trying to find these answers. So if you turn with me to Matthew chapter 6, we'll look at some of Jesus' words about treasure. So Jesus

says this in Matthew chapter 6, 19 to 21, So Jesus references treasure as being in heaven in Matthew chapter 6.

Then, in Matthew 19 and Mark 10, we read of this encounter that Jesus has with a rich young man. This man wants to know about how to have eternal life.

[4 : 56] This young man in Jesus' day, he had everything the world could throw at him. He had wealth, he had privilege, he had reputation, and he even kept the law to a T, or so he thought, but he wasn't sure that was enough.

He didn't feel certain that he had the greatest treasure of eternal life. So he approaches Jesus one day. And Jesus, seeing this man, he's filled with compassion for him straight away. Jesus actually saw through him. He saw his life wasn't as whitewashed and clean as he might make himself look. And Jesus challenges him at his heart to give up his possessions.

This is something he valued above all else. And the reason why? Again, so this rich young man could have treasure in heaven, and so he could follow Jesus.

So treasure in heaven comes up again and again throughout the Gospels. And I think when we come to the parable of the treasure and the pearl, it's a similar pattern again. Again, the meaning behind the treasure of all treasures is eternal life.

[6 : 00] It's about heaven and it's about a future that would look very different to the hostile and rejecting world that the disciples back then would have seen Jesus facing.

So in a sense, this is the not yet stuff. It's the not yet stuff. It's things you have to put your trust and faith in that they will happen because they haven't happened yet.

So just like the labourer who chased the treasure and the pearl hunter, notice that they don't have or they don't possess that treasure just yet. When they find it, they understand even though they don't have it, it is worth anything to get it.

And they are willing to do whatever it takes, even sell all they have. Now, we have to be very clear here that gaining eternal life, gaining the treasure of heaven, it can't just be bought.

It can't just be made in a transaction. Jesus in this parable, actually what he's doing is using the idea of selling everything to amplify his point of how important the treasure is and how important that treasure should be to us.

[7 : 05] We simply don't have enough that we can barter with God. We can't even say that we'll meet God halfway. So it's kind of like this. It's like you going to Elon Musk, the richest man in the world, and telling him you have a fantastic business deal you want him to consider.

And when Elon says to you, sure, that's great, I want to hear all about it, you sit down, you look Elon in the eye and you go, Elon, I understand you have an excellent company in Tesla. Look, the cars are cool.

They're electric, they're eco-friendly. I mean, it's amazing. So here's what I'm willing to do. I will trade you everything I own, everything, including my 96 Camry, my house, my car.

I'll even give you my pet dog and cat. And I just want you to give me Tesla in return. Thank you very much. You know Elon Musk is never going to accept that deal, ever. He won't just give his \$150 billion company for a house and a car or even a lot more than that.

Maybe he'll give you Twitter instead, I don't know, but definitely not Tesla. The only way you could have Tesla shares is if he gave them to you as a gift. So this parable can't be about getting a transactional purchase to happen to get eternal life.

[8 : 16] Otherwise, it totally voids what Jesus did by dying on the cross for us, and it's impossible for us to pay the price for what the treasure is. So really, what it's about, it's about a heart that's willing to have eternal life, no matter what.

A heart that's willing to have it. A willing heart for an awesome, eternal reward. Now, you would think that would be more than enough to motivate us every day.

Do you find it that easy, though? I mean, do you ever wonder why it's so hard to get out of the bed to live for heaven and for when Jesus comes back next? Maybe you're not like me, but that's something I struggle with and wonder about.

Do you ever find that it's just easy to get caught daydreaming about those things of lesser importance around you? What I'm kind of thinking, what I'm kind of wondering is I think as Christians, sometimes we try to project our perspective of earth onto a perfect heaven.

That's how we try to make sense of it. I think quietly we sometimes say to ourselves, well, look, if earth is kind of running at 50% and I could have a few more possessions, you know, if I can have

that mansion that Jesus promised, a few less fights with people I love and definitely less sickness. [9 : 31] We're all sick of being sick at the moment. You can hear wheezing and coughing and things. And you know what? No starving kids. Then that would be heaven. So then really heaven is earth running at 100%.

Well, you might be surprised, but the Bible doesn't actually give us many descriptions of what eternal life, of what heaven, of what the not yet will be like.

The Bible does use similes and metaphors and symbols to describe heaven. We are told this. We're told that no eye has seen, nor heard, nor the heart imagined what God has prepared for those who love him in 1 Corinthians.

So in other words, we can't fully comprehend exactly what it will be like. And perhaps that's why we fall into the trap of trying to superimpose this, you know, perfect earth onto what heaven will be.

Now, there is some truth there will be similarities, but really it is much, much more than that. And the key to unlocking this, I think, of understanding what these parables mean by the greatest treasure being eternal life is this.

[10 : 45] Eternal life is more about a person than a place. Eternal life is more about a person than a place. John Bunyan, the famous 17th century Puritan, a guy who wrote A Pilgrim's Progress and many other books, he says it like this.

We do not come to a set of doctrines. We do not come to a church. We do not even come to the gospel. All these are vital. But most truly, we come to a person, to Christ himself.

So I think this is at the heart of what Jesus is driving at with his disciples as he sat with them explaining this picture of the kingdom of heaven with the treasure and the pearl.

The not yet will be amazing. Heaven will be amazing. We can't comprehend it. But in that moment with the disciples, Jesus presented himself right then and there as the greatest treasure they could have.

It was the here and now, not just the not yet and in the future. It's why Jesus told the rich young ruler to come and follow him to truly find the greatest treasure.

[11 : 49] And it's why Jesus says, I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Now, you can imagine the encouragement for the disciples hearing this.

I mean, they watched Jesus experience some incredible rejection. He was already hated by the religious elite of that day. Jesus didn't fit the mold. The kingdom he talked about wasn't what the power brokers, wasn't what the influencers, wasn't what they're wealthy expected or wanted. And Jesus' parables before had shown just the nature of the battle around them as many would hear about the kingdom Jesus had come to bring. But they would ignore it. You know, they would twist it. They would revolt against it.

So, to hear Jesus say to the disciples, to hear this message that you have got it, you've got it, you have the treasure and it's me, it must have been a profound moment.

If you think back to the disciples' own stories in coming to know Jesus, they simply offer a wonderful picture of immediate change. Think of John when he said, See, the Lamb of God.

[13 : 00] And two of his followers turned and followed Jesus straight away. Changed in a moment, just like that. They were willing, they believed the Christ had come.

The light switch had flicked on. Or when the disciple Andrew heard from John that they had found the Christ, he immediately turned and followed Jesus. The same thing has happened over centuries and millennia since.

Those who hear God's word and just decide to follow no matter what the cost. I think this is it. This is what the greatest treasure does to us. The greatest person ever known Jesus, he changes people.

He's in the business of changing people. And he changes us from the inside out. And today is no different. Jesus is still calling and people are still turning from sin and following him.

So, if Jesus is the greatest treasure we can have right now, why doesn't life seem a bit easier? I mean, it seems to be a hostile and crazy world to be living in as a Christian, doesn't it?

[14 : 01] I mean, it's good to know we're going to have a pain-free existence one day in heaven. But what about now? I mean, isn't having family, a few good things, career and health enough for this life to make you happy?

Why do you need Jesus? Some might even say it makes our lives harder. We're more likely not to be socially accepted because we say, we act, we do things that are different to what society norm

is.

So, for the Christian life, it isn't easy. And Jesus hasn't promised it's going to be easy. Even in our church or many churches, there's individual differences. We've got people of different backgrounds. And we're called to serve and be part of the body. We can hurt each other. Relationships constrain. We struggle with the pull of our natural desires towards selfishness and pride.

And we battle against Satan who actively tries to undermine the church and each one of us in shining the light of Christ to others. I remember going back to visit the church I grew up in one day.

[15:03] The church I knew had struggled with conflict and people had been hurt. There had been real pain in worshipping together. And some people had been even discouraged, disillusioned.

But I remember vividly this moment where after the service, I sought out the elder. He's a man I deeply respected and highly possible I wouldn't be following Christ today if it wasn't because of his influence.

I sat there next to him that day and just said to him, how are you going? He just turned to me and he said, quietly and softly, he said, Andrew, I'm learning about fellowship in suffering.

Andrew, I'm learning about fellowship in suffering. And he went on to tell me about living with two Corinthians in mind. It was just a moment. It like blew my mind. Like he was a guy who could tell me about how others had hurt him and how they deeply pained him.

Or he could even just blame other people. But instead, he chose to show humility and his care and love for his brothers and sisters. At heart, he cared for others just like Christ loved the church.

[16:08] So when we hit big hurdles, when we ask, is it worth the cost, when the Christian walk really hurts, I think we simply need to come back to the person of Jesus to understand more about who he is at heart.

Just like I learned that day. As Jesus actually says, where you put your treasure is of far greater, far greater importance than the circumstances of your life.

And in fact, Matthew chapter 6 says it actually matters most where you fix the direction of your heart because that is where your treasure is. And that's what is going to anchor you in the storms of life.

So Jesus is really saying here that at our very center, at our very core, from our desires to our passions to what we plan for, even our sense of purpose in this life, it's all driven by our heart.

And we'll find our treasure there. So it doesn't matter what happens to you. What really matters is where your heart is focused. If the direction we fix our heart is important, does this mean the direction Jesus fixes his heart and his treasure is also important?

[17:23] Absolutely. Absolutely. Because Jesus calls us out to treasure him, then we need to understand what he treasures. To know that we're going to have a sure, a secure, unbreachable trust.

To be confident that we can step in faith towards him and know he's going to move towards us. There's this beautiful insight into Jesus' very heart.

What he treasures. What he came with purpose to do. And what engages his very own passions and emotion. And here it is. So please read with me from Matthew 11.

Matthew chapter 11, verse 28 to 30. It says this. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

[18:27] So when Jesus says he is the greatest treasure and you need to come to me, he's saying you can. Precisely because of who he is at heart.

Those who qualify to meet Jesus are those who labor and are heavy laden. These are the people he treasures. These are the ones he dearly, dearly loves. We don't need to come and make a payment or try a transaction with Jesus.

We need to come with a willing, a contrite, and a humble spirit before a holy God. As Dane Orland, who wrote Gentle and Lowly says, these words in Matt 11 from Jesus, his very own testimony, his very own heart, and he is showing who he is.

And who he is, he's tender, he's open, he's accommodating, he's understanding, and he's willing. He is there for every weary and discouraged Christian and for every soul who would say they can't make it through this life alone.

Isn't this the supreme treasure we're looking for? I mean, to have someone with the power and authority of Jesus who says, just come to me, rest on me. I mean, these words just lighten the soul

and our load.

[19 : 50] And more importantly, they have real power when we actually listen and do that. We come to Jesus. In fact, not only can we simply come to Jesus, we can come with an abundance of joy knowing that he delights in that.

He delights in us coming to him. Just like the treasure hunter in our parable, you can almost see with delight of finding his treasure, how he nearly bounds, he nearly leaps immediately to sell everything that he has to get this ultimate prize.

So when we stop and think about who Jesus is at heart, not just what he's done, we can celebrate knowing that he moves towards us in our sin and not away from us.

We have a king who's the Holy Son of God who moves towards us, touches us, he heals us, he embraces and he forgives us. Those who truly least deserve it but yet desire it.

God's kingdom is good, isn't it? I mean, we just don't do this enough. We don't revel in the beauty of what God has revealed to us. And while it's true, it's been revealed to some, it's also true, it's been hidden to others.

[21 : 04] And our first parable with the labourer who finds the treasure that's hidden in the field is a good example of how the gospel seems to be revealed only to some and not to all.

I suspect part of the reason we find the kingdom of heaven is hidden to some is it's part of our human tendency, our human nature, to find good things and turn them into ultimate things for our own satisfaction and to the detriment of seeing the best thing in Jesus.

I don't think, and I'm sure you can share this with me, I don't think it's hard to find a number of good things that can soon be prized as most valuable but are instead far cheaper substitutes than what's on offer in Jesus.

Now think about it. You've got career, success, reputation, image, all of the above. Yet, I think if we ask most of our neighbours who aren't Christians what they would say their greatest treasure is, I don't think they'd actually rate any of those as their greatest treasure.

I think they would rate their most valuable treasure as family. They would tell you family is most important. They'd see it as the Holy Grail, the most important thing.

[22 : 20] I need some more water. I don't know if you've heard of Dr Bruce Perry.

He's one of the leading psychiatrists in the world today. Brilliant man, brilliant mind. But he cuts to the heart, I think, of why family is so important to people today.

And he says it like this. He says, So this is why family has such powerful drawstrings.

He says, He actually says to us, I'm going to offer you the ultimate family.

He offers us to be part of his family, part of his kingdom. And the head of this family, Jesus, showed his love just for you by dying in your place, rescuing your life.

[24 : 00] He exchanged his life at great cost and gave us a gift to know him. He not only declares us righteous, but he also declares us to be his children, his sons and daughters, adopted into his forever spiritual family.

Now, if you know Jesus, just look to your left and right. Look to your left and right. You have a spiritual family that extends far greater than these walls throughout many other churches in Newcastle and around the world.

And we can know a love beyond what even our earthly families have given to us because of the very creator of the world. He never leaves us. God never leaves us. He loves us so much that he gave us dignity and value by including us as part of his very own family, brothers and sisters in Christ.

So when we look at this life from the perspective of laying hold of the greatest treasure in Jesus, what we've exchanged or given up, it's just put in its place, isn't it? It's really not a cost or a sacrifice to follow Jesus.

It's a privilege. It's a privilege in knowing Jesus and following him. Jim Elliott, the missionary who was killed at the hand of South American natives, as he tried to faithfully share the gospel, says it like this.

[25 : 18] He says, He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose. Just like Jim Elliott, we can run with joy towards what we gain in Jesus as our greatest treasure, knowing that we don't need to fear what we lose, even family.

Now, it's entirely possible you've come to church today, you've heard about Jesus, but you've never really considered being willing to follow him. I want to ask you today, if that's you, if that's you here

today, if you are putting your family in the ultimate treasure bucket, like most would, I want to ask you, if you believe that so strongly, then why not believe in Jesus and the ultimate family he has to offer you through knowing him?

I'm not going to argue our earthly families are great and very valuable, well, in the right doses. If you do know Jesus, I mean, isn't it?

It's just incredible, again, to revel in what we have in Jesus, the treasure of all treasures. And I just want to leave a story with you to encourage you, if you're here today, you know Christ.

You may have heard of Corrie ten Boom, a Christian living in Holland during World War II. Her family is quite well known because they decided to try and save as many Jews as possible, and they tried to save them by hiding them in their house, because the Germans occupied Holland at that time.

[27 : 04] So, young Corrie ten Boom, though, she knew it was only a matter of time before they were going to get taken to a camp by the Germans. She knew they were going to get found out. So, before this day happened, she packed a bag with some of her most precious belongings, a Bible, warm clothes, paper, pen, toothbrush, medications.

It wasn't much, but it would be invaluable when she was imprisoned. So, the day came. The German soldiers made their raid. They burst into the house. And as it turned out, Corrie had an extremely difficult decision to make that day, because she realised when the Germans busted in, when they came in, she'd left her bag in front of the hiding place, a small panel that would give away where the Jews are hiding in their house.

So, if she took her bag of small comforts, she'd risk exposing all the Jews hiding with her. What did she do in that moment? In that moment, she left the bag.

She left it behind. She esteemed the value and life of her Jewish brothers and sisters as far greater than the small bag, the prison bag that would keep her comfortable in prison.

I think this is an amazing picture of how we can hold on to our own prison bags, our own safety blankets, our own cheap treasures in this life, when we have the ultimate treasure right in front of us.

[28 : 30] I don't know what those prison bags are or those safety blankets are for you today. You know that. But I do know that God wants you to know the greatest treasure is in him, and it's totally worth the price of whatever you need to let go of.

So, if you're a Christian here today, keep moving ahead in full confidence of the treasure you've laid your hope in. Leave your prison bags and safety blankets behind and press ahead for the joy set before you in meeting Jesus so you can hear him say, Well done, my good and faithful servant. Amen. Amen.