

In the Outcome

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[0 : 00] The reading is from Matthew chapter 13, beginning at verse 44, and it can be found on page 988 of the Church Bibles.

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.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers, but threw away the bad.

So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace.

[1 : 16] In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It's wonderful to be back with you this morning.

I don't know about you, I find summer quite difficult with everyone away, kind of cut off. It feels a little bit like from church family, so it's wonderful to be able to see so many of you. I'm going to pray as we begin. Father, we are this morning concerned with such weighty, weighty things, things that have eternal significance, things that have eternal judgment.

Lord, there is so much that could be clouding our minds this morning, so much that could be distracting us from hearing what it is that you have to say. Father, please, we know that you do not speak. We know that you do not speak unless you decide to.

We know that we cannot hear unless you open our ears. We know that we cannot change unless you change us. So please, Father, would you impress upon us your word this morning.

Show us the eternal value, the supreme worth, the glorious beauty of the reign of your precious son. And please, would we go out of here changed and loving and savouring and valuing him more.

[2 : 32] Amen. Amen. Well, we are this morning, and if you've been around over summer, you'll know that we've been in a series in Matthew 13, and we are concerned this morning with the kingdom of heaven.

That's what we've been thinking about. And I want us to think, you know, if we went down to Sunday school, it's one of my favorite questions. If we went down to Sunday school and we asked them, kiddos, is the kingdom of heaven valuable?

They would obviously look at you and go, roll their eyes and kind of say, well, I know that the answer is yes, because it has heaven, and is it good in the question? So therefore, it must be good. So then the answer that they give would be yes. But then if we pushed them and said, why? If we asked that very simple question, why is the kingdom of heaven valuable? Why?

Well, they might look at you nonplussed and think, well, that's a rather difficult question to answer. We might think that's a rather difficult question to answer. What is the kingdom of heaven? Is it valuable? Why should I value it?

[3 : 25] Is it valuable at all? Well, we're going to see, but as we've been seeing kind of in the buildup to Matthew's gospel, if we'd been here kind of week after week, if we've been preaching right from chapter one, the kingdom of heaven is a phrase that Matthew alone uses kind of uniquely.

And what he means by it is he means the rule of King Jesus, the lordship of King Jesus. That's what he means. So we could equally change that question. Is the kingdom of heaven valuable? We could change it to, is the rule, the kingdom of Jesus Christ, the king, valuable?

How valuable is that rule? Now, that would have been a really important question for our initial readers. Edar, if you haven't listened to that sermon from last week, I can commend it to you. It was brilliant. But he really helpfully showed us that to the initial readers, this would have been a very pertinent question.

Because what Christianity was effectively asking them to do was to say, listen, here is a circus of 70 people following a crucified king. If you follow this king, you will be persecuted.

You might die. If you follow this king, your family will hate you. If you follow this king, you might lose everything, but it's worth it. And they would be thinking, I don't think that could possibly be the case.

[4 : 34] Following a crucified king, why would I do that? Why would I be willing to undergo such persecution? Why would I want to do something like that? And just to show you that that's what we've been building up to in Matthew's gospel, if you turn back one or two pages with me to Matthew chapter 12, Matthew chapter 12, just so that we can see this for ourselves in verse 9.

This is one of the most desperate accounts in the whole of the New Testament, I think, for showing man's sin. Matthew chapter 12, starting at verse 9, Jesus went on from there and entered their synagogue. And a man was there with a withered hand, and they, that's the Pharisees, asked Jesus, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him?

Jesus said to them, which one of you has a sheep? If it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out. Of how much more value is a man than a sheep? So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

Then Jesus said to the man, stretch out your hands. And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him how to destroy him.

That is desperate, isn't it, to read. I wonder if we kind of feel the tension in that. Imagine that you're standing there in the synagogue, and you're seeing this happen, and you see a disabled man, and you see the Pharisees goading Jesus.

[5 : 51] Oh, we're going to get him if he heals him. How desperate that man's sin would lead them to a place where they would happily see a man stay disabled, and Jesus break their religious laws.

And so basically this tension has been building throughout the whole of Matthew's gospel account, and then Matthew has given us this chapter of teaching to explain, yes, there's going to be persecution. Yes, the kingdom does not look valuable.

Yes, the kingdom does not look impressive. Yes, the kingdom looks tiny and inconsequential and like it is doomed to failure. But I'm here to tell you it is valuable, supremely valuable.

And of course for us, we might not be in first century Jerusalem, but of course that's going to be a question that we ask ourselves all the time. Is being a Christian really worth it? Is it worth it when suffering comes and those kind of big unanswered questions that we're confronted with them, and we think surely, is it worth believing in a God who I claim to be good, yet suffering is happening? Is it worth it? Or when we're ridiculed at work, or we might be the only Christian in our year at school, it's desperate hearing some of the stories at JAM in our youth group about the kind of persecution and cancelling that some of them go through.

[7 : 05] And they might be asking the question, is it worth it? Is it really worth following this Jesus? Well, we need the answer to that question, don't we? We need the answer to that question.

Is it worth being under the kingdom of Jesus Christ? Now we have two points, and obviously I know that setting this up, you're already thinking, yes, Benji, you're going to tell us yes, and that's going to be the end of the sermon.

But we're going to have two points ultimately this morning, two points, but just to forewarn you or foreprepare you, most of our time will be spent on the first point. So if you're kind of thinking, gosh, he's still going in the first point, do not fear, the second one will be much shorter.

But our two points this morning, we're going to see the supreme value of the kingdom of heaven, and then the reason for why it is valuable. The supreme value of the kingdom of heaven, and then why it is so valuable.

And our passage, if we notice, it kind of breaks into three, but we're going to put them kind of in two halves. So we have two parables in verses 44 to 46, and then we have a kind of explanation of those parables in 47 to 50.

[8 : 13] And just to show us that Matthew intends us to hold these little sections together, just have a look with me at verse 44, the kingdom of heaven is like, dot, dot, dot. Verse 45, again, the kingdom of heaven is like, dot, dot, dot.

Verse 47, again, the kingdom of heaven is like, dot, dot, dot. In other words, Matthew is making it really clear for us, hold these three things together. And so we'll spend the most majority of our time seeing the value of the kingdom, 44 to 46.

And then we will see the explanation in 47 to 50. So point number one, and this is all on your handout, so if you want to be able to kind of follow along, the eternal value of the kingdom, verses 44 to 46.

Why don't we read those out and have a look at those together. 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.

[9 : 21] And now these parables are relatively similar. I hope we see that. Both men find something of value. Both men immediately, and I wonder if we saw that, there is no sense of hesitation in these verses whatsoever.

They find the treasure. They find the pearl. They rush off, sell everything so that they can get the treasure, so that they can get the pearl. Now, of course, Jesus is using this as a metaphor. That's why he uses all simile.

It's a simile, isn't it, with the word like? Yes, it is a simile. It's a simile. Apologies. It's a long time since I did GCSE English, but there you go. It's a simile for what the kingdom of heaven is like. It is like an incredibly valuable treasure, an incredibly valuable pearl.

But these are two men are willing to sell everything in order to have. So it's relatively straightforward, we might think. But I want us basically, we're going to spend most of our time squeezing these verses for all they're worth.

There are many implications we could take from this. I initially had nine. You'll be pleased to know we're only going to cover five. Five implications that we're going to take away from this. Five implications that will help us see the supreme value, the eternal value of the kingdom.

[10 : 29] The first thing that I want us to notice from these verses is that the kingdom must be found. The kingdom must be found. It is not obvious. Both of our men are looking for this treasure.

Do we see that? A man, verse 44, The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy goes and sells all that he has.

Verse 45, 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.

Do we notice this? That the kingdom of heaven needs to be found. It is not as though, in other words, that you can be given this kingdom of heaven. It is not as though by virtue of necessarily maybe your parents being a Christian, or the fact that you go to church every Sunday, or the fact that perhaps you might know who Jesus is, or occasionally pray to him, or think he's a good man. No, you have to find the kingdom of heaven. It has to be found. It has to be sought. Every single person, man, woman, and child, has to make the decision to find, sell, and buy for themselves this kingdom.

[11 : 36] It can only be had by each and every single one of us. The kingdom must be found. It is not obvious. The second implication that we're going to see, again, and this is probably the one that we were most thinking, gosh, that doesn't seem like particularly prudent financial planning advice, is that everything, everything must be sold to have it.

Everything must be sold to have it. You imagine the scene. Our pearl man stumbling across this great pearl. He sees it, rushes home. You imagine that conversation with his wife.

Dear, you're not going to believe this. Sell the house. Sell the house. Where's your wedding band? Sell that too. Engagement ring, I know how much I've spent that for.

I know they don't depreciate. You're selling it. Kids education, yeah, Tammy and Tabitha, we're pulling them out of school. Can't afford it. All the money's going. The holiday, refund it. The plane tickets, refund it.

The TV, we're selling it. The washing machine, we're selling it. The pension, cash it in. And on and on our man goes. Everything. Can you imagine the wise face thinking, he's gone completely mad.

[12 : 43] The man is saying that absolutely everything, no hesitation whatsoever, every single thing must be sold. Every single thing. Just so that he can have this one pearl. You must sell everything, he says to his family.

And off he goes. There is nothing, it seems, to our man that compares with this treasure. That's the second thing. Everything must be sold to have it. And therefore, the obvious implication that follows from this, third implication, this is not a diversified portfolio.

Look at me. Bet you didn't know I knew the words diversified portfolio in the same sentence. Our man, don't know if you knew this, but he has a financial planner called Nigel. All financial planners are called Nigel.

He sits down and says to Nigel, I'm firing you. Sorry, Nigel. Really sorry to bring you that news. You're fired. But before you're fired, Nigel, I need you to cash in everything, absolutely everything I have.

I need you to cash it in. Don't ask me any questions. Just do it. You can imagine poor Nigel, just been fired, and meeting with a madman, thinking, but what about your pension?

[13:45] And security and retirement? We spent hours talking about the ways in which that you wanted to kind of stagger your retirement and bring it back, and all of these. Yeah, yeah, no, cash it in. Don't need it. Don't want it. I just need the money. Put it in a bag.

Rucksack. Don't care. Cash it in now. But what about Timmy and Tabitha's future and grandkids? You put aside this nice trust, and I spent weeks kind of legally making sure that it was all cashed in. Need the money now. Nigel, what part of cash in everything, absolutely everything, do you not understand? But what about your stock portfolio? We spent so long putting that together. You wanted to invest in green, whatever the case may be, and it's made 8%.

That's pretty good. Like, if you think the interest rates are only 4% in the bank, I made you 8%.

Cash it in, Nigel. What part of this do you not understand? And you can imagine Nigel's confusion. And as he looks back, may I ask why? Why do you need all this money now? And our man replies, I found one pearl, and it costs everything I have to own.

[14:47] So I'm going to sell everything, and I'm going to buy it. Now, that newsflash, apparently, is terrible financial planning advice. Not that I would know.

I have no need for financial planners. But I'm told that the number one rule, Financial Planning 101, is diversify. In other words, don't put all your eggs in one basket because if the egg opens, I think as the metaphor goes, and the eggs fall out and break, you've lost all your money.

In other words, don't put all your assets into one place. So imagine, though, just to really get ourselves in this mindset, imagine, though, that you are now looking for a financial advisor and you go and you meet this person, and instead of telling you all the things that you think they should tell you about ISIS and banks, and, you know, you can tell I've really scrubbed up on this particular area of expertise, instead of telling you to really diversify, he leans in conspiratorially and goes, look, you could do all that stuff.

You could. But I found this pearl, and you won't believe this, but it costs exactly your net worth. Sell everything you have, buy this one pearl, you'll thank me later.

You would leave thinking that he was trying to introduce you to a Ponzi scheme or a cult. You would absolutely not take this man, I hope you would absolutely not take this man's financial advice.

[16:04] It is insane financial advice to place everything that you have into one pearl. Insane. Except that's absolutely what our man does.

Sells everything so that he might have this one pearl. Fourth implication. It follows then that the kingdom of heaven will never depreciate in value.

What does it say about whatever, however valuable this kingdom is? If our man is willing to lose all financial security, all of his homes, all of his assets, all of his children's perceived future, educational future, what does it mean about the amount of security, comfort, and hope that this pearl, this kingdom, must bring him?

Money is a wonderful thing when used rightly. It provides security. It pays for gospel work. It means that we can help our loved ones when they're in distress. It means that we can enjoy the nice things that God has given us.

But what does it therefore mean about the infinite value of this pearl if our man is willing to forgo all of that for the sake of having this one thing, just one thing? The final implication, fifth implication, is joy.

[17:19] Now I have to confess at this point that I am not a very good Bible reader because I've read this passage year in, year out in my Bible reading and never noticed that little word in verse 44, joy.

Have a look with me. 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.

Now, can we just try and put ourselves into that man's position and contemplate what joy he must have been experiencing to think that there doesn't seem to be a single hint of begrudgingly or unwillingly selling all that he has.

He takes one look at the treasure that he's found and with a joy that is so great, instantaneously, I've got to sell everything. And so he does.

And so he gets it. And if we're honest with ourselves, do we not long for a joy like that? A joy that transcends all the kind of earthly worries and concerns that we could be striving for.

[18:30] Now, I know that A-level results have recently come out and for a lot of young people, there has been a fleeting joy at feeling like their work has been vindicated. But does it last?

Does it last to the extent that we'd be willing to lose everything for the sake of some A-level grades?

No, I think that that can't be the case. This is a joy that transcends everything, every possession, any security that the world could offer, a joy that is worth being destitute for, is what our man is saying.

Do we not want that more than anything? A joy that is that precious, that fulfilling, that wonderful. You know, the Christian, and this is one of the sad things that, one of the wonderful yet sad things about doing youth ministry, is that you often hear the reason why young people don't want to be a follower of Jesus, and I've heard this many times, is because it's boring.

Boring. And you want to weep. I understand why that's potentially what they say, but that is what they say. And because their perception is that the Christian is some kind of morose monk flagellating themselves and pursuing some kind of weird form of self-denial, Bible studies on a Tuesday, and not watching the films that they want to watch.

Never mind not realizing, though, that the Christian life, the kingdom of heaven, offers joy. Joy. We are not offering some kind of self-abasing, self-help scheme.

[19:57] That is not what Jesus has come to offer. The kingdom of heaven brings joy. And if you don't yet know Jesus, is this not what you ultimately want?

If we think about where we spend our time, what we spend our time striving for and working for, is it not joy? And yet the Christian claim, the claim of these verses, the claim of the Lord Jesus Christ is that the kingdom of heaven brings joy.

What kind of joy? The kind of joy that a man would willingly lose everything, give up everything, for the sake of having it. Here then is the supreme value of the kingdom of heaven.

That's our first point. I told you it would be long. That's the eternal value of the kingdom. And we move now to our second and final point, verse 47 to 50. Before we kind of dive into the verses, though, we haven't actually touched on why this kingdom is so valuable.

We haven't actually explained or seen why our man has decided to sell everything for one pearl. None of us here, I think, are pearl fishermen. None of us here are necessarily likely to go and find treasure.

[21:03] Buried it, well, maybe you will if you have one of those metal detectors. I don't think so. Going to go find treasure in a field. So what is the metaphor or simile saying? Why is this kingdom so supremely valuable?

It is very rare to see a man give up all that he has, absolutely everything, for one object. Why? What is it that our man has understood? What is it that he's seen about why this pearl is so valuable?

Have a look with me at verses 47 to 50. Here comes the explanation for our two parables. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age.

The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The way that our explanation is working is using another metaphor of fisherman.

[22:08] So the technical term is bycatch. I've had a naughty little Google. That's my fishing terminology for you there. Bycatch, which is where you chuck a net over the side. Fishermen chuck a net over the sides and it indiscriminately pulls everything up.

So sometimes you'll get fish that you want, sometimes you won't. And then when you bring it back to shore, the process begins of sifting. You take the fish that is worth something and you go and sell

it and the fish that is not worth something, that is the bycatch that has sadly died in the net, you discard because it's not worth anything.

And that is the image that is being used here about the end of the age. Have a look with me again at verse 49. So it will be at the end of the age, the angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous.

Now angels were the executors of God's judgment in the Old Testament. It's why whenever you see Mary or the shepherds in the Tivity story, they're terrified. I wonder if you've ever been confused.

We think of angels as lovely, fluffy, chubby babies sitting on a cloud.

Angels are executors of God's judgment. They are death bringers often in the Old Testament. So it's perfectly right to be terrified. And that is what Jesus is driving at here.

[23 : 18] That just like how the fishermen sift their catch, so the angels will sift every man and every woman. And those that are righteous will be saved.

And those that are not, verse 50, will be thrown into the fiery furnace and in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. In other words, the point that Jesus is making is here is the consequence of whether or not you have found that pearl.

Here is the consequence. Why is the pearl of such supreme value? Because of its eternal consequences, which is the second point on the handout, the eternal consequences of the kingdom.

In other words, what Jesus is saying is it really, really matters on that day which side you are on. It really matters. Now for any of us who have been recently watching the Oppenheimer film, I haven't seen it, but I did read the biography that it's based on.

It's a fascinating story of a race, ultimately, who can get to the atomic bomb first. And it really, really matters which side of that race you were on for obvious reasons.

[24 : 28] You do not want to be on the wrong side of the man who is racing you to make the atomic bomb as the culmination of World War II found out. And that is exactly the point that Jesus is driving at here.

Because the point being made is that when the sorting happens, every single one of us will be asked one question. One question. What did you do with the rule of my son?

What did you do with the pearl of great price? What did you do with the kingdom of Jesus? What did you do with Jesus? Every single one of us will be asked that question.

And how we answer that question, what we did with Jesus, will either determine his acceptance of us, or will result in what verse 50 says, being cast into the fiery furnace, a place where there will be weeping, and gnashing of teeth.

Those are terrifying words. We might cringe as we hear those words, but they're words from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ himself. That's the decision that Jesus is saying.

[25 : 37] If you have the kingdom, if you've accepted Jesus, that is not your fate. If you've not accepted my kingdom, that is your fate. There's the choice.

And so therefore, as we've said, how we answer that question matters. And it's really important that we get absolutely clear that the question that God is going to ask us is not going to be, what were your A-level results?

And you think, well, I got into my university of choice. That's not going to be the question. Our financial resources and how we stewarded them and what we did with them, and we kind of try and present that to God when we meet him and he asks us.

Well, that's not going to be the question either. Our religious allegiances, I was christened as a baby. I went to confirmation class. I took my first communion. That's not going to be the question.

When we die, we will open our eyes before the king and he will ask us, what did you do with my son? And that is why our man with the pearl is joyful.

[26 : 43] That is why our man with the treasure sells everything he has to find it because he now has the answer to that question. He knows what he's going to say to God. When he opens his eyes and God says, what did you do with my son?

He will say, Jesus is Lord. I bowed the knee to King Jesus, which is the big idea of Matthew's whole gospel. Will you accept the king? Will you accept Christ? That is why our man is joyful.

Many of you will know as we also heard praying about that we've started a ministry in the Elms. And the Elms is a care home for older people. And there's a lady who used to be a resident there called Jean.

I've mentioned Jean a few times. She was wonderful. Jean had been in the home, for those of you who don't remember, for 27 years until the point that she died because she was tragically hit while she was cycling her bike by a motorbike and she was severely disabled.

She lost her left leg, she was hunched and she had no use of her hands. And so she arrived in the care home in her 70s and she died at 95. A few months ago. And she ran the Bible study and the Sunday service there for 27 years.

[27 : 53] And she prayed for every single one of her residents every single day. And she was the most joyful woman I've ever met. And I remember asking Jean as she was kind of hunched over and I was asking her how her morning was and she said it was wonderful and I just could not fathom how anyone's morning in this particular circumstance could be wonderful.

She said because I got to read about the story of the Lord Jesus Christ with the woman at the well and I thought one day I'm going to see his face. Is that not just the most stunning beautiful outlook on life?

Here is a woman with no children severely disabled an estate agent and a youth worker her entire life in Brixton incredibly disabled as we said in constant pain and she said I am joyful because one day I will see my saviour's face.

But then she added and she always had a good wit but I'm slightly jealous Benji she said and I thought why are you jealous Jean? And she said because I have to wait until I die to meet him whilst these pesky disciples got to see him whilst they were still alive.

As in the thing that she was jealous for was not the world's wealth it wasn't academic achievement it wasn't children it wasn't grandchildren it wasn't any of those things she was jealous because she had to wait six more months to meet the Lord Jesus Christ that's what she was jealous about it was a great privilege to get to pray with her just before she died Jean had understood in other words what actually is of value what actually matters what actually brings true everlasting joy it is the Lord Jesus that is it.

[29 : 34] So we said didn't we that our initial readers would have been feeling really pressured at the thought of why would I follow this kingdom of circa 70 people scattered all over the place and persecuted well here is the answer because they have the answer of what to say to God when they meet him they know they have eternal life that if they are in the Lord Jesus Christ kingdom they are saved they are his and I started asked with a question at the beginning how valuable is the kingdom do we really want to continue going on as a Christian well hopefully this passage has made it absolutely clear that one day there will be a judgment one day a reckoning and if you are a Christian then you already know the answer you already know what you have you already know what to say I am a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and that is joyful everlastingly so why don't I close this in a final prayer Father we thank you so so much that we know what we are to say when we see you face to face at the end of the age we thank you that when the judgment comes and the sifting happens that we can rest safe in the assurance that the Lord Jesus

Christ has purchased us that we have the pearl that we have the kingdom that we are safe Father please would you convict us and encourage us with these words to live in light of what truly matters to live in light of what has eternal consequence to live a life of joy Amen