

Sacrifice for the Kingdom of God

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[0 : 0 0] So we've just read the parables of the hidden treasure and the priceless pearl, and I'm sure most of us have heard these parables many, many times before with the question of what are you prepared to give up for the salvation that God offers?

And I'm not going to dispute that question, I'm not going to say that that's not what the parables are asking, but most of us have heard that many, many times before. So I'm going to bring a slightly different perspective on that.

We talk about God's kingdom being now and not yet, but yet so often we focus on God's kingdom as something from the future, and we forget about the now.

Revelation 21 describes a new world, a new kingdom where God will dwell with us. But if we focus entirely on that and we miss the now that God's kingdom has, we're missing half the point.

When we pray the Lord's prayer, we say, our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

[1 : 1 6] Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That suggests we are talking about God's kingdom here where we are.

When we talk about the priceless, the hidden treasure or the priceless pearl, this is what we're talking about. We're not just talking about something off in the distant future.

Last time I stood up here and preached, I said that it's not enough to just open the Bible and to just read the Bible. If we don't act upon it, we're missing out on half of the joy that God has in his word.

Likewise, it's not enough to just say, well, I've got my salvation now, so I know what's coming. Because if we don't act upon God's kingdom here today, we're missing out on half of what God has to offer.

We have to understand the value of God's kingdom then. To give a little bit of detail about the two parables, I've been given three verses to preach on today.

[2 : 2 7] So I am going to be jumping through the Bible a little bit. So if you want to have your Bibles handy, you might find that helpful. I've got two longer passages that will come up on the screen in time.

But to delve into these three verses specifically, the buried treasure, that was perfectly normal back then. If we talk about they would all have maybe not memories, but they would have knowledge of the time of exile, when invading armies came and took them away, when people had to flee for their lives when people were scattered.

And at that point, they didn't have banks where they could store all of their riches. So they would bury them in a field where they would be safe. And sometimes they wouldn't come back for them.

The field might pass on and the people who receive that field don't know the true value of what is buried there. They may not even know what is buried there at all.

It's likely a worker who was hired to work in that field who stumbled across this buried treasure and immediately recognized that this is somebody's life savings.

- [3 : 35] The pearl. Pearl fishing was a dangerous thing to do. They didn't have diving gear. And pearls are only found at the deepest points of the ocean.
- So people would dive down with one breath. And if they were lucky, they would manage to get an oyster before they had to swim back up again. And then they'd cut that oyster open.
- And if they were even luckier, they'd find just a small pearl that had begun to form. And then they'd go down and they'd do the same thing again. And they'd get another oyster. And then they'd do it again.
- And then they'd do it again. And they always had to do it with just one breath. People risked their lives to fish for pearls or to swim for pearls.
- So somebody who goes looking for pearls in the marketplace already knows the value of them. The merchant already knew that somebody had risked their life to get this priceless pearl.
- [4 : 38] That is the value of the treasure that we are talking about. We are talking about somebody's life savings, their every possession. We are talking about something that someone has given their life for.
- The man in the field probably wasn't looking for treasure. He was likely just working there. And he found it by accident. The merchant was looking for a valuable pearl.
- Maybe to sell on, maybe to add to his collection. But he was searching. But the value of the treasure remains the same for both of them. Whether we stumbled across Jesus by accident or because Jesus made himself known to us.
- Or whether we went searching for him. The value is the same. So how much would you give to be part of that kingdom here today?
- In Philippians 3 verse 8, Paul says, What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.
- [5 : 51] I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ. When Paul said this, he was in prison. But he didn't spend his whole Christian life with nothing.
- But he counted everything he had as nothing compared to what Jesus had to offer. In Mark 10, I think we might have this one on the screen.
- As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down and asked, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?
- Why do you call me good? Jesus asked. Only God is truly good. But to answer your question, you know the commandments. You must not murder. You must not commit adultery.
- You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother. Teacher, the man replied. I've obeyed all of these commandments since I was young.
- [6 : 52] Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. There is still one thing you haven't done, he told him. Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.
- Then come, follow me. At this time, at this, the man's face fell and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Jesus didn't start that conversation by saying to the rich man, you've got too much money.
- Jesus said, actually do what you know you should be doing. And the rich man thought he was clever and said, but I've been doing all of that. And Jesus saw through it.

He saw that all of these riches were more important than what really mattered. The rich man wasn't at fault for being rich.

He wasn't at fault for having money. He was at fault for how that was more important to him than Jesus was. When Jesus gave him an offer, sell everything and follow me.

[8 : 12] And he was sad because he had to sell everything. When I became a Christian at the age of 12, I was told that there would be a cost to being a Christian, to following Jesus.

But I think I completely misunderstood what that meant. As a teenager, I went through a lot of difficult times.

I was bullied through most of my schooling life, but things got worse at secondary school. I started dealing with almost constant stress, started struggling with mental health issues.

I didn't sleep properly. And more, the list goes on. And I believed that that was the cost of following Jesus. But I think I was wrong.

I believed so much of that was the cost of following Jesus that actually I lost interest. Because I decided, if I have to go through all of this just to be a Christian, why is being a Christian that good?

[9 : 17] Why is it that important? So I gave up. Obviously, I turned back to God again. And this time I did things. I looked at things differently.

I don't want to say that life as a Christian is easy. It isn't. And it would be remiss for me to not comment on and point out that there are Christians all over the world who do risk their lives every single day just to follow Jesus.

We prayed for some of them earlier, just a little while ago this morning. And sometimes that might be a cost that is asked of us.

But I don't think it is the cost. And when we misunderstand the cost of following Jesus, I think we misunderstand what God's kingdom is about.

So what is God's kingdom? It's a life where God is in charge. Where God reigns.

[10 : 22] Where he is in the driving seat. It's a life where we are not the most important person in our lives. This year, my sister is celebrating their second wedding anniversary.

And my parents are celebrating their 40th wedding anniversary. And they're doing something big to celebrate. And I remember them saying to me and to my sister, because, well, predominantly to my sister, I think I was there because it was my sister who was getting married at the time.

Actually, their marriage has lasted this long. Now for 40 years, at that point, 38 years. Not because they see each other as the most important person in their lives, but because they're the second most important person in each other's lives.

They both have God there first. And when they both have that common thread of God in the driving seat, of God as the most important person in our lives, they've been through difficult times.

They argue. I definitely know that they argue. They have times when they might have falling outs, when they might get, when they'll get upset, they'll get stressed. But they always, always make it through.

[11 : 47] Because before the day comes to an end, they look at who's there in number one. And together they pray. And they give it to God.

And they apologize. Jesus says, anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

Anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Jesus says, I am supposed to be the number one in your life. That doesn't mean other people are not important.

But I'm number one. God's kingdom means a change of lifestyle. Maybe it means giving up that thing that we know isn't good for us, that we know shouldn't be doing.

It means a change of mindset. Looking at people differently. Seeing people, whether it is our youth and our children who come to blue, who run around, who sometimes cause damage, sometimes have injuries.

[12 : 50] Looking past that and seeing them the way that God sees them. Or whether it's the couple who were on the steps outside of the church this morning. Looking past the fact that they might have been there taking drugs.

Looking past the fact that we don't necessarily want that in front of our church. But seeing them how God sees them. It's a change of priorities. Maybe getting home and spending two hours watching TV might help us relax.

But actually, are we pushing God away? Is that good for God's kingdom? When we're thinking about our time, when we're thinking about the things important. It's a world where every life is important.

We prayed for Ukraine today. I'm sure we all know that Donald Trump thinks he has an answer to the end of the war. But his answer is to give Putin what he wants.

To forsake the people in Ukraine. To treat the people who are losing everything like that doesn't matter. But in God's kingdom, every life is important.

[14 : 01] God's kingdom is a world where the rich, the strong, the powerful, they don't come out on top. Because there is nobody who comes out on top other than God.

This kind of life is hard. I said being a Christian isn't easy. And it isn't. It shouldn't be. Because it means standing out from those around us.

Looking different. Being different. It means standing up for those that others leave behind. It means standing in often messy situations to support those in need.

It means standing with God even when others around us don't get it. There, as I mentioned, there are people who go through very, very tough times.

There are people who put their lives on the line purely for the choice to put God first. But it's not the putting their life on the line that's important.

[15 : 11] It's the putting God first. Because if God isn't there first, what are they doing it for? It's important for us to remember when we look at the treasure in the field, the priceless pearl, they don't lose their value once somebody's bought them.

Once that field has been bought, once the pearl has been removed from the marketplace, they keep their value every single day. For us to make a sacrifice, make a cost to follow Jesus, isn't just about what will you give for the salvation that God has to offer you.

But what will the cost be that you will choose, you will pay to put God first every single day, to choose God's kingdom over our own?

Last week, Richard made the point that we don't sacrifice things. Sorry, last week, Richard made the point that we don't fast for the sake of fasting. Likewise, we don't sacrifice for the sake of sacrifice.

Jesus said to the rich man, sell everything, give the money to the poor, and follow me. That is the point of sacrifice. Choosing God's kingdom is the point of sacrifice.

[16 : 41] That is why there are people across the world who risk their lives to follow Jesus. It's not because they feel good risking their lives. It's not because it's easy.

It's because they, every single day, choose God's kingdom. I'm sure several of us may have made New Year's resolutions this year.

A lot of people give things up for Lent in order to better themselves. Actually, this year, I'm going to have a healthier diet so I can lose weight. Or they do it to look good.

Or they do it to feel good. In Matthew 6, verses 2 to 4, Jesus says, So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others.

Truly, I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. That your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

[17 : 51] Verse 5, And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray, standing in the synagogues and the street corners to be seen by others. Truly, I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

And verse 16, When we make sacrifice, we don't do it to look good.

If you do, your reward is looking good. If you do it to feel good, your reward is feeling good. But we do it not for our sake, but for the sake of God and for what God has to offer.

We're coming up towards Easter and thinking about sacrifice. So let's look at Jesus's example. There is a theological perspective to see these parables as Jesus is the man in the field, or Jesus is the rich man, or the merchant at the market.

And he finds a priceless treasure in us. There is a theological perspective to see things that way. Some people will disagree with that and say that's not the point Jesus is making with these parables.

[19 : 13] But I think that point can still be found. In Philippians 2 verse 8, when Paul is talking about how we respond to each other, he says, And being found in an inappearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Jesus didn't die for the sake of dying. He didn't die because it would look good. I'm pretty certain he didn't die because it would feel good.

Because I'd be fairly certain it probably didn't feel good, especially not on the cross. John 3 16, For God so loved the world that he sent his only son to die.

Jesus' sacrifice was for us. It was for us to be part of God's kingdom.

When we sacrifice, we don't do it to look good, or to feel good, or for the sake of doing it. We do it for the sake of God's kingdom. What do we think these people did with the treasure that they found?

[20 : 26] Particularly the merchant, what do we think he did with the pearl? I'd wager he probably made a big deal about it. He might have put it up on display. He might have thrown a party.

He might have told everyone he knows that he has found this amazing, priceless pearl. So, what do we do when we are part of God's kingdom?

Matthew 5, Jesus says, You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. When we have this valuable treasure, not just the salvation and the future kingdom that is to come, but when we are part of God's kingdom here and now, it's not good enough to just quietly bury that in the ground and to say, well, that's what I do in my home life, or that's what I do on my Sunday life.

As I said before, being a Christian means standing out. It means standing up. It means standing with God.

[21 : 49] For Jesus, God's kingdom meant healing the sick, spending time with the rejected, looking out for the needy.

I think if we can have the Matthew 25 on the screen. This is verses 34 to 40.

Then the king will say to those on his rights, come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me in. I needed clothes, and you clothed me.

I was sick, and you looked after me. I was in prison, and you came to visit me. Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?

[22 : 50] When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? The king will reply, truly, I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

Jesus gave us the example of what God's kingdom here today is like. Maybe we do need to make some sacrifices to really be part of God's kingdom, not just in the future, but here, now, today.

Maybe we need to give up our pursuit of money, or a bigger house, or a better car, or our prized possessions. Are those things more important to us than God's kingdom?

How about striving for recognition, for power, or authority? Is that more important than God's kingdom? Maybe it's our time.

We've got a volunteer board that we've had there since the start of the year, and we are constantly calling out for more volunteers to help us do the different things that we do as a church.

[24 : 12] But there's also more to it than that. We have, I know, Matt and maybe one or two others are involved with other projects, such as we have CAP, we've got the Job Club, the Money Course, we've got Food Banks.

There are all sorts of different things that we do specifically to be part of God's kingdom, to look out for those who have need, to make a space for those whose society says, you're not old enough to be part of the world, to be part of our world now.

Or you're too sick, or too infirm, or you're too elderly to be part of our world now. God's kingdom says they all have a place.

And that's why we do the things that we do. And maybe we need to give up our time for that. Or maybe it's a change to our lifestyle. Or maybe it's giving up our pride.

Maybe there's somebody who we need to forgive and we've been choosing not to. We've been choosing to hold something against them. Maybe there's been an argument because we assume that we know what's right.

[25 : 27] And that's our pride talking. Or maybe it's like the people sat outside this morning. We say, well, actually, I'm here to come to church and I want to look good as I'm coming into church.

But that's not what God's kingdom is about. When Liz went up to speak to them and to say, what can we do for you? The good Samaritan.

Being the person who doesn't just walk past and say, that's none of my business. Or say, I'm too good for that. But actually gets into the mess. Takes a chance and speaks to people who are in need.

Even if that may not go well. Even if that might actually take quite a bit of our time and means, oh no, we could be 20 minutes late to church. What do you need to do to see God's kingdom the way that Jesus does?

See, it's not enough to just look at the future kingdom and say, well, we've done our bit. Our salvation is secured. It's not enough to just call ourselves Christian.

[26 : 40] If I call myself a writer and never write down any of the stories I have in here, what good is that title of writer? If I call myself a football fan and never watch any of the games or follow the team, then what good is that title?

If I call myself a singer, but never let anyone else hear me sing. If I call myself someone who cares about the environment, but never speaks out about the damage and the harm that we are causing to God's world.

Or I call myself a friend to the poor, but I never sacrifice anything to support them, to get into the mess with them. If I call myself a leader, but never trust the people that I'm leading.

If I say that I'm someone with a heart for children and young people, but yet I never give anything to be part of or to support the youth and the children who come to us, then what good are those titles?

James says faith without actions is dead. It's not good enough for us to just say, well, yeah, I have faith in Jesus. My salvation is secure. That's not the example Jesus gave us for God's kingdom.

[27 : 57] That's not the cost that Jesus talks about in these parables. If I call myself a Christian, but never follow Christ's example for living out God's kingdom here and now, what good is that title?

So what is your cost, your sacrifice for being part of God's kingdom? Not the one-off cost or sacrifice to secure your salvation, but the ongoing, everyday choice to put God's kingdom before our life.

Amen. Amen. Amen.