

The Greatest Treasures

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Preacher: James Blackwell

[0 : 00] So, friends, I'm very sad to say we've come to the end of our short series on studying some of the parables of Jesus together. I found it really helpful for me in my studies to look at some of these familiar passages again in more depth, and I hope it's been a good experience for you too, and that you've all learnt something and been blessed from it.

The last couple that we've looked at have been rather solemn, looking at the warnings of the gospel and the warnings of being covetous and things like that.

So today we're going to look at something a bit more cheerful. We're going to look together today at the two parables of the greatest treasure, so the treasure in the field and the pearl of great value.

So I'm sure many of you have tuned into Radio 4 at some point in your lives, and you've heard the program Desert Island Discs. Maybe some of you are avid listeners.

Maybe it's part of your daily routine to tune in and hear what this, that, or the next famous person is saying. It was recently named, after all, the greatest radio program of all time.

[1 : 17] So a hefty praise indeed. It's been on the go since 1942, so it's coming up to 80 years of being broadcast on the air.

80 years and over 3,000 episodes have been recorded during those 80 years. If you're not familiar with the program, the idea is quite simple. Guests are invited to come along and share some things they would take away with them if they ended up cast away on a desert island.

So they're asked to choose three things. They're asked to choose a musical album. They're asked to choose a book. And they're asked to choose a kind of a luxury item.

You're automatically given things like a Bible or whatever religious text that person adheres to, if any. And, yeah, it's quite an interesting thing to think.

If you had these things and only these things for the rest of your life, what would you pick? Popular choices for books include things like Charles Dickens, you know, the classics, Jane Austen, all these kind of things.

[2 : 27] And they've even allowed the use of audio books for people that have sight problems. So if you're not very good at reading or your sight is failing, fear not, you can still choose your book.

The idea is really quite revealing because what people choose to take to this desert island does reveal something about them.

And it should make you think really hard because if you're going to have these things for the rest of your life, you want to make sure that you're not going to get bored of them. You want to make sure that you make the right choice, that if you take, you know, chocolate biscuits, you're not going to get sick of eating chocolate biscuits every day for, you know, the rest of your life after just a week.

You need to make sure that you make the right choice. Another good example of what we're thinking about today is the idea of running into a burning building to rescue some treasured possession.

If there was one thing in your house that you would save over everything else if your house was on fire, what would that thing be? What would take you to run into that burning building to rescue that treasured possession?

[3 : 46] What holds the most value in your life? What can you just not bear to be parted from? What cannot be replaced?

We read a lot of parables today because I wanted to kind of get the whole context of the passage, but the two parables we're going to be looking at are the very short ones that we read right at the end.

And these parables tell us something. They tell us that there is something immensely valuable. They tell us that there is the most valuable thing that ever has existed, that we could ever have.

Something so valuable that it's worth losing everything else in order to get it. These parables tell us how valuable the kingdom of heaven is.

How much more valuable it is compared to that music album, that book or that biscuits or whatever, or even that treasured thing you would rescue from your burning house. These parables tell us how much the kingdom of God is worth everything.

[4 : 56] So three things then. This morning we're going to look together at discovering and then at selling and then obtaining. So discovering then. These two parables both begin in a similar way.

They begin with the act of finding something. Two men, we are told, find something of incredible, unbelievable, incomparable worth.

The first one tells us of a man who finds treasure buried in a field. And the second tells us of a man who is searching for pearls and then finds the very best available.

Matthew 13 verse 44 reads, 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 he has and buys that field.

We're not told an awful lot about these men, but we can maybe work some things out based on the content of the parables. We can probably work out that the first man wasn't a particularly wealthy one.

[6 : 06] He would probably have been quite poor. Maybe he was like one of those day laborers that we read about in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. You know, he worked day to day, hand to mouth.

Perhaps he'd been hired to work in that particular field on that particular day. When to his great amazement, as he works away in the field, under the heat of the day, he stumbles across a hidden treasure hoard.

His discovery was a total accident. He wasn't looking for it. He didn't expect it. He had no knowledge that there was going to be treasure buried in that field somewhere.

It was a complete surprise to him that he was just working his regular day job. We do hear very similar stories in our own time, don't we?

You hear farmers plowing a field and all of a sudden they uncover some kind of ancient Saxon treasure hoard or a Viking burial or something along those lines. It doesn't happen every day, but it does happen often enough that it keeps people excited, doesn't it?

[7 : 11] It keeps the metal detector business going as people see these things in the papers on the news and think, you know what, I maybe have a chance myself.

So they'll go out and buy metal detectors and go hunting in fields themselves. In the ancient world, it was pretty common, really, for wealth to be buried like this in plots of land.

Although there were banks in ancient times, they didn't exist in the same fashion as the banks we have today. They didn't really come into being until the Renaissance in Italy, mostly.

So people needed places to securely store their treasure, their wealth. And most people didn't have a lot of space in their homes. They didn't have great palaces or fortresses in order to stash their wealth.

So quite simply, they would secretly bury it somewhere on their land. And hopefully nobody would find it. It would be a place that only they knew about.

[8 : 10] It would be a secret. Sometimes, however, the person who hid this wealth, who buried it in the field, would unfortunately die without being able to pass on the location.

Maybe it was an unexpected death, an accident or something. We love stories about these kind of things, don't we? We love stories about hidden treasure that can be found anywhere if you're lucky enough.

It's fueled Hollywood and novel writers for years, these stories of treasure hunts and great, exciting finds. You know, a hidden pirate treasure or a secret map hidden in a painting or these kind of things.

We love these stories of treasure hunts. And the man in this parable comes across this great treasure. And upon seeing it, he just has to have it.

It must be his. So what does he do? We're told he covers it up again and then goes away to sell everything he has. He goes away to scrape up enough, just enough to buy that field for himself.

[9 : 17] So this great treasure will become his. Whenever you hear this parable, it always kind of brings up questions of ethics, doesn't it?

You think, oh, you know, was the man right in doing what he did? Did the treasure really belong to him? Should it really have belonged to whoever owned that field, you know, the rightful owner? You know.

There are some who suggest that under rabbinic law at the time, if you were to find a lost treasure, it would have been yours. It's, you know, kind of a finder's keeper's kind of rule. I think the phrase goes, if a man finds scattered money, it belongs to the finder.

That's one possibility. Kind of maybe excuse the man's actions. However, if that was the case, if simply the act of finding it would have made it his, then why would he feel the need to go and buy the field?

It just doesn't quite make sense. However, there is precedence in both Jewish and Roman law that the treasure would belong to whoever buys the field, as long as the original owner doesn't know that it's there.

[10:21] Again, maybe a little bit questionable, but the legality or the ethics is really not the focus of this parable. It's not what Jesus is trying to get across.

It's simply that the man wasn't looking for it. He wasn't searching for it, and yet he came across it. But not by chance, because after all, we don't really believe in chance.

But rather through the providence of God, the man found this treasure. Through the providence of God, God put that treasure there in that field through the original owner.

God put that worker there, that particular location on that particular day, to dig that particular patch and to find it. This is sometimes how we find the gospel.

We aren't looking for it. We're not going out to churches, or we're not looking at world religions, or we're not reading spiritual books, or these kind of things. And yet, God sets up the circumstances in such a way that one day, out of the blue, whether somebody comes up to us, or a friend or a loved one, who themselves have just found it comes, tells us the gospel, and it changes our lives forever.

[11:40] That's the first discovery. The second one is really quite different. Verse 45 reads, 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 he had and bought it.

This time, the discovery doesn't happen by accident. The man is actively searching for the thing that he finds. We're given a brief account of a professional pearl merchant, who, unlike the first man, was probably reasonably wealthy.

And he was out searching for fine pearls. And he was an expert. He was a merchant himself. He knew what he was looking for. Out of all the jewels and riches that came out of that part of the world, of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, it was pearls at that time that were considered to be the most luxurious thing.

They were much rarer back then than they are today, and they were considered to be more valuable in some cases than gold or even diamonds. One scholar claims that even some pearls were worth the equivalent of millions of dollars in today's money.

And this man was out looking for the very best one that he could find. He was looking for the finest. One might think that as a merchant, perhaps his reasoning was so that he could find this pearl, buy it, and then sell it on himself for a great profit.

[13:18] The parable doesn't talk about that at all. If you think about it, even in our own modern world, it's not unusual for people who have great wealth to collect great valuable items, works of art, precious stones, statues and things.

It's not uncommon for people to collect them. Not to sell, but rather just to enjoy. This man is different than the first.

He knows what he's looking for. He's studied pearls. He knows which ones are flawed. He knows which ones are okay, which ones are passable, and which ones are flawless.

He perhaps already had a collection of pearls himself. His business may have involved them. He knew that there were better ones out there, so he keeps looking until it lasts.

He finds it. This man was looking for it. He was searching for it, and then he came across it, not by chance like before, but rather through the providence of God.

[14:32] God put that pearl there in the market for that particular day. God gave that merchant a heart and a knowledge of pearls. He then put that merchant there on that particular occasion on that particular day to find exactly what it was he was looking for.

Again, this is another way of how we may find the gospel. People are sometimes looking for it. People may be looking in all the wrong places, though.

They may be looking at other world religions or philosophies or spiritual things. They know there's something out there. They know it exists. They're just out there searching for it.

And then God sets up the circumstances in such a way that one day, after much searching, we finally come across the thing that we are looking for, and it changes our lives forever.

Two men, two different situations, two hidden treasures, and yet there is the same response from them both. So we have discovering, and then we have selling.

[15:39] Both of these men knew they had found something so valuable, so precious, that it had to be theirs no matter the cost. It was hidden at the start.

The kingdom of God really is currently hidden. Most people don't see it. Most people aren't looking for it. Most people don't care about it, which is both dreadfully sad and also pretty terrifying.

Like these items of immense value, the kingdom of heaven is hidden. And then when those whom God has ordained find it, whether by looking or not, they become so overwhelmed by it, so enthralled by it, so taken by it that they must do whatever they can to make it theirs.

The first man in our parable was poor. He probably didn't have much, and yet he was not only willing, but also driven to give up everything he had, what little he had, to sell it all, just so he could scrape together enough money to buy this field, so that buried treasure would be his.

The return on his investment would have been well worth the effort, and the loss of his possessions, of even his home, if you think about it. The second man was rich.

[17:02] Unlike the rich young ruler, who refused to sell his many possessions when Jesus asked him, this man saw the great value of the pearl in front of him. He knew it was worth getting rid of everything else he owned, his other pearls, his home, his own business even.

All his possessions would be sold, so he could have this one great priceless pearl. And again, the return on his investment would have been more than worth the effort and the loss of all his great property.

Two men, two different situations, and yet the same outcome. These two men were willing to sell everything they had, to give it up in order to gain these great treasures.

Last week we looked at the parable of the rich fool. We saw the great dangers of hoarding great wealth. Well, now Jesus is saying that the gospel, that the kingdom of God is such a great reward, that it is worth giving up that great wealth, that we may have it.

Can you only imagine if that farmer who had had that great year, and had that multiple crops, and he almost had enough wealth to last his entire life, can you imagine if he had given all that up for the gospel, how different that story would have been.

[18:30] The truth is, though, is that Jesus, that following Jesus, always demands sacrifice. It demands the sacrifice of worship, the thing we're doing here today, that casting off of our own self-dependence, and totally relying on God for everything.

It sometimes demands the sacrifices of our freedoms. It sometimes demands the sacrifice of friends, and families, and sometimes even our very lives.

But it can also call for financial sacrifice. It can call us to give up sometimes promising careers to serve God somewhere else, maybe for half, or if not less than what we could have otherwise have earned in the private sector, or whatever.

It calls financial sacrifice in giving to the church. Giving time to the church is a sacrifice too.

Volunteering your time, that you could be spent doing other things.

My wife and I love watching Wimbledon, but we very rarely get to watch the finals, because they're on a Sunday. You can only just watch a recording, or if it runs late enough in the day, you can maybe catch the end.

[19:52] But, you know, this is more important than any, you know, Wimbledon final. There are many things I would love to do, many clubs or activities or whatever that take place on a Sunday, which automatically means I can't do them.

Is it easy sometimes to give up things, to give up activities that we may enjoy, to sacrifice our time, to give up finances?

Is it easy? No, not always. But is it worth it? Absolutely. So we have discovering, we have selling, and then finally we have obtaining.

It is worth it, because if you're called to give something up, if you're called to sacrifice something for the kingdom of God, the return will be so great.

But if you're called to do this, if you are called to give something up, would you do it? Maybe you really love your job.

[21 : 00] Maybe you really love all the benefits that come with it. Maybe you really love your pensions, or these kind of things. But if God called you to give all that up, and go and serve in the mission field abroad, would you do it?

If you had a season ticket for your favorite football team, something that costs a lot of money, that you spent a lot of time trying to get a hold of, and yet God calls you to come and serve your church on a Sunday, that you really need to do something, that there's a job only you can do, but it means you're going to miss half the matches of your season ticket.

Would you be willing to give that up? If God called you to serve the church in a different part of the country, if he called you to leave your home, your family, and your friends, and your job, would you do it?

Because if you truly are a Christian, if you have truly found that great treasure yourselves, if you have really discovered that great immeasurable worth of the kingdom of God, then the reality is there should be nothing in your life that you should not be willing to give up in order to obtain it. Not even your very life. Many Christians throughout history, and even today, have been asked to make that choice. Will you keep your faith, or will you keep your life?

[22 : 35] Will you make sacrifices to Caesar, or will you die? Will you follow Muhammad, or will you die? If you preach today, we will come and we will kill you.

You must follow Rome, or you will burn. If you read the accounts of martyrdom, there's one thing that stands out of them all.

Even as the fires burn, the flesh of the martyrs, or the waters rise above their heads, these saints do not give up their faith. They do not give up that wonderful treasure.

They do not give up that pearl of great price. Quite often you find them praying for the very people who are taking their lives on that day. But they too would find that great treasure.

And once you've obtained it, you know that it's worth so much more than anything you've ever had, anything you ever will have, anything you have now.

[23 : 40] There is nothing, nothing at all, more valuable than what God is offering you. And that's because what he offers is not a jewel, it's not a hoard of gold buried in some field.

What he offers you is himself. God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, the Lord of hosts, Yahweh God, the great I am, gives you himself.

He gives you himself, he gives you his son, he gives you his Holy Spirit. And if you have these things, if you have God, then you have everything.

Nothing can match its worth. Nothing. Because from this great treasure came everything. Does following Jesus cost us a lot?

It does. Jesus himself tells us of this in Luke 14. If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

[24 : 58] Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. following Jesus is hard.

But as one scholar put it, anyone who counts the cost of discipleship has completely failed to grasp the greatness of the reward. They're hard words to hear and yet they're also true because the reward is nothing other than God himself.

The main motive of these parables is not fear. If you look at them, the main motive of these things is joy.

We think we need many things to bring us joy. The truth is we need only one. We need only God. We need only his son. So friends, as our time amongst you comes to its end, be sure today of Jesus' great love for you.

Be sure today of the great treasure he is for you. Because once you get that, once you grasp that, once you see how valuable he is, then really nothing else can compare.

[26 : 30] Jesus Christ is the endless treasure. He is the pearl of great price. So today, gain him and in doing so, gain everything.

Let's pray. Amen. Almighty God, we thank you that you are our everything. That Jesus Christ is our great treasure, that great pearl of great price.

That there is nothing that can compare, that there is nothing more valuable, that there is nothing worth more than him, than knowing you. Lord, we pray today that you would help us to have the courage to sell everything we have, to give everything up to obtain that great treasure, to go where you call us, to sacrifice what you need us to give, to serve you wherever you've called us to serve. Lord, we pray that you would help us, that your spirit would strengthen us in this deed, that we would not be like the rich young ruler who is too sad to give up his great wealth, but we will give whatever you ask, whatever is necessary to obtain this great treasure that is you, that is your kingdom.

Father, please, we pray, bless this church, this congregation, help them all to find the great treasure themselves, that great pearl of great price, to find Jesus to be their Lord and their God and their Saviour today.

[28 : 08] Help them in the future as they search for a minister, and may he too know the great value, the great worth of having Christ in their life.

Lord, be with us today, bless us, encourage us, help us, and sustain us. In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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