

Understanding the Kingdom of Heaven

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[0:00] Amen. Join me in reading this sermon text for today.

! 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 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Good morning, Shoreline Baptist.

[1:36] Oh, I'm sorry, Shoreline Bible, Community Bible Church, right? I should get the name right if I'm going to be here. Again, my name is Marcus Wilson. I'm really glad to be here.

I do bring you greetings from Christ Proclamation Church up in Windsor. We are a church planting church, so we were planted about 10 years ago and have been up there in that area and have had just the fortune of the Lord's kindness to plant a church in Manchester.

And we're hoping that that just continues into the future. We're just excited about bringing more gospel light to the communities of Connecticut. And just to get a little bit started here, reminding, as Mike mentioned, my family, my wife, my wife and I, we met in Burlington, Vermont.

And this is actually relevant to the sermon, so I'm going to get into it in a minute. And one of our first kind of big group dates that we were on, we went and watched the movie Gladiator. Anybody made a movie Gladiator?

Well, unfortunately, we sat down in the front row, which if you know this movie, it's quite graphic and a lot of speeding things going on. And I think we were both dizzy by the time the first scene got over.

[2:51] But the reason I mentioned Gladiator and the reason it came to mind is because Ridley Scott, who was the director of Gladiator, and it was obviously a major hit, right? The movie Gladiator is very well known.

And so this epic movie that he made, he decided to try his hand again a couple years later with another movie, another epic. And this one, instead of being set in the Roman Empire, this one was set in the Middle Ages.

He wanted to produce a movie that would show what was going on during the time of the Crusades. And that movie was called The Kingdom of Heaven. Now, in this movie, it's set in a real historic time, although he obviously, as Hollywood directors do, they take quite a bit of liberty with what's actually going on in the movie.

It isn't really sticking with the historical essence of it. But to a certain extent, it did. He was dealing with King Bradley IV, was the name of the king at the time.

He was the king of Jerusalem. And he was European. And King Bradley IV held kind of a tenuous hold over the city of Jerusalem. There was actually a peace treaty with the Muslim armies at the time.

[3:59] A sultan by the name of Saladin, who had one of the largest Muslim armies that had ever been assembled, was really at the gates. But they had this treaty together. And they were working together to see if they could continue to have this kingdom go on with Bradley IV.

And unfortunately, as most tenuous treaties go, we're still living in these days today, that treaty was broken. There was somebody on the European side who attacked a caravan of women and

children.

And that's what he was accused of. And as it turns out, Saladin decided that that was the end of the treaty. And that was the end of the kingdom of Jerusalem. So Saladin attacked. Muslim armies overwhelmed Jerusalem.

And they took over. And that was the sign of the end of the second crusade. But this movie, calling it the kingdom of heaven, was an appropriate name for that time and place.

Because according to the Europeans, who were willing to fight and die for the cause, and especially according to their leaders, who encouraged them to this endeavor, that was exactly what was at stake.

[5:13] Jerusalem, right? The city early Christians actually fled from, right? The city that Jesus declared a woe over.

Those who would suffer through the battle with Rome 40 years after Christ's death. How could the crusaders get it so wrong? How could they possibly think that the kingdom of heaven is a city on earth?

That we have to send millions of young men into terrible odds in order to retain. Now, it's pretty easy for us in the 21st century to throw stones at the crusaders.

We may be much more educated and culturally sensitive now. But do we understand the kingdom of heaven? Are we, the church of Jesus Christ, getting this right?

Or is the influence of worldly thinking getting us distracted? Now, the world around us certainly does not understand the kingdom of heaven.

[6:16] Our society rejects God, yet tries to create their own version of heaven here on earth in a broken world of sin and pain. In that sense, utopia can never really be achieved.

So we want to better understand the kingdom of heaven. And in this morning's passage, as we've just heard, Jesus tells three very brief parables, even providing an explanation of the last one to help his listeners understand the kingdom of heaven.

And we just heard them. The parables are the treasure in the field, the pearl of great value, and the net of fish, with a specific explanation to go along with that.

But in order to start considering each of these parables, we have to make sure that we understand what we're actually talking about.

I mean, what does Christ mean by the kingdom of heaven? The apostle Paul, I'm sorry, the apostle Matthew was actually very captured by this idea.

[7:23] His gospel translates the phrase kingdom of heaven 31 times. Do you know how many times that phrase kingdom of heaven appears in the rest of scripture?

Zero. Matthew is the only one to use it. Now, of course, that doesn't mean that Matthew is doing his own thing, or that we can't define the kingdom of heaven, but it does mean that we need to dig a little deeper.

It is true that a number of these occurrences actually happen within parables, so that it makes it difficult to define, since Jesus assumes the definition when he says the kingdom of heaven is like. But Jesus also uses the phrase a number of other circumstances. All right. So you can hear me all right there? Okay. That's a little better than the rhythmic clicking, right?

I'm going to put you to sleep there. All right. Okay. So we're starting with the kingdom of heaven surveyed, right? We're talking about what's going on in this kingdom of heaven defined in this beginning part here in Matthew.

[8:32] So when Jesus first shows up in his ministry, right, he announces the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And with it, he calls people to repentance.

Now, next, the phrase appears a handful of times in the Sermon on the Mount, twice in the Beatitudes. Jesus tells the crowd that both the poor in spirit and those who suffer for righteousness will inherit the kingdom of heaven.

So Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven as a place everyone should want to be, but not everyone is allowed in. When Mark and Luke relate some of these same parables, they quote Jesus as saying the kingdom of God, which is essentially the same thing.

But why the kingdom language? Well, we need to think about what it means to be part of the kingdom. Now, being in a country like this one, we don't often think this way, do we? Right? We think of citizenship because in the United States, the country is by the people and for the people. But in a kingdom, you contemplate something slightly different.

[9:38] A kingdom contemplates subjects. Right? What is the difference there? Because being subject, right? Being subject to someone means that you are no longer self-directed.

So being part of God's kingdom means you are not your own. For you were bought with a price. The price of Christ's blood on the cross.

1 Corinthians reminds us. Now, if you reject God as king, now that doesn't change the fact that he is still God of the universe. But it does change your standing before him.

That's why the kingdom of heaven brings into view both salvation as well as judgment. Both covered in our passage today. So we start with the kingdom of heaven in salvation.

The first two parables drive after this point. So let's review them now. The first is the unexpected treasure. Verse 44 says, The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up.

[10:47] Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Now with parables, we want to be a little careful when we read and apply.

Because we don't want to over-read a parable, right? They were told to drive home usually a singular lesson or point. Not intended as a universal illustration of truth of every element.

So there's, for example, there's no special reason it's in a field. And there's no significance in the man hiding it. What is significant is that a man finds a hidden treasure.

And he immediately commits himself to that treasure. It doesn't bother him that he has to give up everything else that he has because the treasure he has found is what he's given.

But the man didn't expect to find that treasure. It doesn't appear that he was searching for treasure at all. He found it hidden in a field.

[11:42] He stumbled upon it. Unexpected treasure. And that's the way it often happens when people come to follow Jesus. Completely unexpected.

Think of the most prolific author of the New Testament letters. Saul of Tarsus. Later called Paul. Listen to how his personal friend Luke relates the story in Acts 9.

Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus.

So that if he found any belonging to the way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus. And suddenly a light from heaven shone around him.

And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And he said, who are you, Lord? And he replied, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

[12:44] But rise, enter the city, and you'll be told what you are to do. And then we have this interchange where God calls Ananias into the midst of this situation. And Ananias is like, hey, I know this guy.

He hates us. Are you telling me I'm now supposed to go to him? I'm supposed to come out of hiding, which by the way, we were hiding because of him, and go to where he is actually staying? Well, thankfully, Ananias believes the Lord. And Paul is cured of his blindness. And then what does Paul do? The one who is ready to catch and imprison followers of Jesus?

Listen, this is in verse 20. And immediately Paul proclaimed Jesus in a synagogue, saying, He is the Son of God. And all who heard him were amazed and said, Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon his name?

And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests? Saul increased all the more in strength, And confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

[13:49] Amazing. Paul starts his journey trying to hunt Christians down. He's infamous. He's dangerous. But suddenly, he's confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus.

He didn't see that coming, did he? It was completely unexpected. Fast forward a few chapters for another unlikely candidate for salvation.

One of my favorite stories of conversion and scriptures. Found in Acts 16. This is when Paul and Silas, they're in Philippi. And they confront a slave girl with an unclean spirit.

And they drive it out. And as a result, the owners are furious. Because she was making them good money for her fortune-telling gift that they were taking revenge. So they incited the magistrates against Paul and Silas.

Verse 22 says this. The crowd joined in attacking Paul and Silas. And the magistrates tore their girdles off them, gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely.

[14:56] Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison, confessing their feet on the stocks. The jailer. He's a hired thug of the Roman authorities.

Right? And he fulfills his orders. He treats them like he would any other criminals. Putting them in stocks in the most secure part of the prison. Probably pretty unnecessary for two missionaries, don't you think?

But God, he's the one who put them in the middle. Because when they're in the center of the prison, everyone around them can hear. And that doesn't deter Paul and Silas.

Of course, they have something more valuable than freedom. They have the treasure of Christ. So they're singing at midnight. And everyone can hear them. And then God causes an earthquake in Philippi.

And the prison is destroyed. Now this poor jailer, he must believe the gods are against them. Because a prison destroyed by an earthquake in which the prisoners escape means certain punishment for him.

[15:55] And he cannot face it. So even though he has a family at home, he decides that suicide will be preferred to what would face him with the Roman leadership. Verse 27.

When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself. Supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, Do not harm yourself.

We are all here. The jailer called for lights and rushed in. And trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas and brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be safe?

So they told him to believe in the Lord Jesus. And listen to the result. They spoke the word of the Lord to him and all who were in his house. And he took them that same hour of the night and washed their wounds.

And he was baptized at once. He and all his family. Then he brought them up to his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

[17:01] The jailer and his family found an unexpected treasure. Now he didn't go to the graveyard shift in the prison that night pursuing the kingdom of heaven.

He probably didn't know much about it at all. But he found it. The suicidal Philippian jailer found the treasure. Now maybe you are here today as a brother and sister in Christ and can attest to this same phenomenon.

I wasn't looking for Jesus at all. I thought the Bible was fairy tales. And then through a circumstance, a person you knew or thought you had that you couldn't shake, suddenly you stumbled upon the truth.

You realized you couldn't get enough. And the things that formerly grabbed your attention and had their grip on you suddenly did not anymore. At least not in the same way. You were happy to give them up.

In joy, you gave them up. You got the treasure of Christ in salvation. Praise the Lord. But of course that isn't how it works for everyone.

[18:09] Is it? So next we have the sought after prize. The treasure isn't always unexpected. Because as Jesus continues talking, he tells another brief parable.

Then it goes a little different. Verses 45 and 46. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search to find pearls. Who on finding one pearl of great value went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Now Jesus is clearly intending to contrast these very two short illustrations. So in this case we have a merchant who sounds like he's in a precious jewel business.

His business is actually looking for fine pearls. That is what he does. He's been trained to find them and he knows the value of what he's looking for. And now he's found a pearl of such great value that he sells all that he has in order to get it.

Now, we don't want to get caught up in thinking, wait. Why does a merchant sell everything he has to get one product that he doesn't want to sell?

[19:17] That just does not sound like salad business. So, yes. And that's why I said this is a parable, right friends? Jesus isn't trying to tell us the story of the confused business.

No, this is a parable. It's a lesson to show that there are those who are pursuing the kingdom. There are those who are seeking after it, pursuing it, searching it out, looking for the truth, unsatisfied with partials or substitutes.

They're seeking the truth that answers all their questions and needs. This is of such great value that there's no other purpose in life but to find it. Like our first parable, the best way I know how to illustrate this is to look again in the word self.

The first example I want to bring out is found in the beginning of the gospel with Luke. Just as the baby Jesus is being dedicated at the temple. Luke 2 tells us this, starting in verse 36.

There was a prophetess by the name of Anna, daughter of Phanuel, the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin and then as a widow until she was 84.

[20:32] She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up that very hour, she began to give thanks to God and to speak of Him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Anna, a woman of Jewish descent, who was also named a prophetess. Look what it says about her. Think about what this means to this woman. She was probably married when most young Jewish women were married, as a teenager.

This means, after her husband died, she was likely in her early 20s. She is now 84. That means for close to 60 years, Anna was in the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day.

But she wasn't some empty-headed religious hermitess. Now, what she was doing was waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem, by the way, which has now come.

And she speaks of Jesus' arrival to all the others who were waiting. But what life does Anna have outside of her faith in the Lord? That is the only way she is actually identified in Scripture.

[21:49] She's this crazy old widow, waiting for the redemption of Israel through the Messiah. She gave up everything else to pursue Israel's redeemer. And then there's those who are really unlikely candidates, but still fall into this category.

This is from Acts 10. In Caesarea, there was a man named Cornelius. A centurion of what was known as the Italian cohort. A devout man who feared God with all his household.

Gave alms generously to the people and prayed continually to God. About the ninth hour of the day, he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, Cornelius!

He stared at him in terror and said, What is it, Lord? He said to him, Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon, who is called Peter.

So he sends for some servants, tells them what he saw, sends them on their way to find Peter. Peter has his own encounter with the Lord and is assured that he should accompany these representatives of the Roman occupation back to Caesarea.

[22:56] So Peter grabs some companions and goes with these guys back to Cornelius. And when they arrive, Cornelius tells Peter the story of how he was encouraged by an angel to find him. And has now gathered a group together to hear from Peter.

And he says this, I sent for you at once and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore, we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord. Now this centurion, he does not have the background or heritage of the Israelites. But he knows and believes in God and is pursuing the truth.

And God appears to him and brings him together with Peter. And we actually know this worked out very well in the long run. Because it says that after Peter preached, the Holy Spirit came into all who were listening.

The sort of Gentile Pentecost. What a great salvation story of a man in the pursuit of the good news as if he was seeking a precious jewel.

[23:58] So maybe this sort of story is more like your own testimony. You knew there was truth. You knew there was value to be found. And you sought after it.

And God threw Jesus and lightened your eyes to see him. And you came into the kingdom of heaven. Acknowledging who you were before God's holiness and recognizing Christ is the only way to him.

So now we've seen the contrast between the two parables. And clearly that is what Jesus was aiming at as he related them. The kingdom of heaven is like this. And then the kingdom of heaven is also like this.

At the same time, the kingdom of heaven is, both of these illustrations, has an essential element of connection. And that's what I'm calling the value proposition.

Clearly this is in view as Jesus relates to these stories using similar language. Right? So verse 44. In his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys the fuel.

[25:00] And then verse 46. On finding one pearl of great value, he sold all that he had and bought it. So what do these two guys have in common? They sold all that they had.

Right? They gave up what they had in order to get that treasure. Now, I'm a person who likes to use my hands. Holding microphones is a little bit difficult. But let me tell you a little bit about how I used to think about this.

Now, I'm going to blame myself for this. So I'm going to assume that everyone in here was not thinking that way. But I'm just going to tell you the way I was thinking about it. And then I'm going to tell you what I think the Bible is trying to teach with this story.

Okay? So first of all, I was thinking like this. So he stumbles over the treasure in the field. He says, I want to go buy the field. So he goes back to his tent or to his house. And he starts counting up all the things he has in his house.

To figure out if he can afford the field. Right? He says, I got to go buy the field. Treasure's in the field. That's what I want to do. Right? So he starts counting everything. Putting it all together. Goes back to the guy selling the field.

[26:01] Says, how much for the field? The guy's like, well, it's a pretty big field. I really like that dirt there. So it's going to be pretty expensive. I'm thinking five talents and 15 denarii.

Wouldn't you know it? When he counted up all his stuff, what was it worth? It was worth five talents and 15 denarii. Perfect. Excellent. That's how you think about us. I don't think that's quite.

I think what's really going on here is that he finds the treasure in the field. He leaves the treasure and says, I want that field. He goes and he takes everything he owns.

He doesn't count any of it up. He just takes everything he owns, goes to the farmer and says, this is what I'll give you if I can just have that field. I don't care about anything.

You can take it all. I want the field. I want the treasure. Same thing with the merchant. Right? Sells all that he has for a pearl. Right? Why? Because that pearl is so precious to him.

[26:58] It doesn't matter what he has to give up. It doesn't matter if there's some value difference from a human standpoint. He gives it all up because he'd rather have that than anything else.

He simply doesn't care. He no longer has need for those other things. All that he had, it was no longer a draw for him. He wasn't concerned about that junk.

He was happy to get rid of it in acquisition of the treasure. Another way to put it would be whatever things he had that were gained, he now considered lost.

As the Apostle Paul says in Philippians 3, Indeed, I count everything as lost because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. This is the perspective of one who's given up all that they have for a treasure that they have found.

[27:58] But not everyone is willing to do this. Remember the rich young ruler? Just a few pages over in Matthew, Matthew 19, Jesus encounters this young man who wants to follow him.

He seems like the merchant pursuing the kingdom. But Jesus tells him this after he asks him, What do I still lack? Jesus says, If you would be perfect, go.

Sell what you possess and give it to the poor. You will have treasure in heaven. Come follow me.

When the young man heard this, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

The simple reality of this encounter is that the young man doesn't see the treasure. He doesn't recognize the pearl. His eyes are blinded by the idol of his possessions.

And we can make the same mistake without it being all about money or even things. Our idols are simply whatever prevent us from giving up all things to gain in Christ.

[29:07] Maybe instead the idol is power or glory. Maybe the idol is your children. Maybe it's about having everything your way. Your own personal quest for meaning in your career.

It could honestly be something that's very much less valued by our culture. But for whatever reason it's an idol in your own life. It can really be anything. Because it's anything that eclipses your view of the real treasure.

And with these thoughts, considering how idols prevent people from seeing the treasure clearly, Jesus transitions to a third parable. One which turns to the concept of judgment.

Rereading this third parable, Jesus says, 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 ashore, sat down, sorted the good into containers, threw away the bad.

And then Jesus explains immediately afterward what that means. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out, separate the evil from the righteous, and throw them into the fiery furnace.

[30:21] In that place there will be weeping and gnashing teeth. This is a unique parable. It's a very simple illustration.

And when Jesus finishes, he explains it very matter-of-fact. So it will be at the end of the age. At the end of time, this is what will take place. The angels will separate the righteous from the evil and throw them into the fiery furnace.

So here in this third parable, who are the righteous? Who are the good ones? Well, Jesus just talked about them, right?

In the last two parables, Jesus tells us, The man who found unexpected treasure and the man who pursued the pearl. Two examples of those for whom the kingdom of heaven is their priority.

They are the righteous who have given up everything to get Christ. But unlike most of Jesus' other parables, The point of this parable is actually fully focused on an element of the kingdom That we don't dwell on too much.

[31:26] But Jesus has no problem at all with it. For the many things the kingdom of heaven is, it is also about judgment. Now as I go forward, please note, I'm taking no liberties whatsoever with this passage to say this.

These are Jesus' words. His statement of the kingdom via parable, His confirmation via interpretation, That this is about judgment. This is about the place we call hell.

The place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. There are two things about judgment the passage makes clear. One is that in the kingdom of heaven, judgment is certain.

Second is that judgment is horrible. Let's start with the first one. Judgment is certain. Jesus brings this up as the normal reality. I mean, just think about His example.

His example of His fishermen. Something people would be very familiar with and see every day.

Just fish them and bring them in their daily haul of fish. Like all dragnet fishing, they're going to wind up with good ones and bad ones.

[32:33] And they're going to separate out the ones worth keeping and throw away the bad. And this isn't coming out of the blue, right? Jesus just talked about the two ways to think about the kingdom. And He starts this one by saying once again, again.

The idea here that He's preaching. This is what the kingdom of heaven is like. Here is one way to look at it. Here is another. And yet here is another perspective. And they all accurately portray the kingdom of heaven.

And this isn't the only parable where this comes up. Just before our passage, in the parable of the wheat and the tares, Jesus says almost the same thing.

This is in verse 40. He says, just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send His angels and they will gather out of His kingdom all causes of sin and lawbreakers and throw them into the fiery furnace.

In that place, there will be reaping and gnashing of teeth. So it will be. Jesus says twice an explanation of two different parables, plainly what will happen. This isn't parabolic.

[33:37] He's no longer telling the story. He's speaking of what will actually happen. The angels will gather all causes of sin and lawbreakers and throw them into the fiery furnace. There will be reaping and gnashing of teeth.

Both parables state these facts as Jesus' explanation. So are we clear on the certainty of that judgment? Do we live our lives like we believe that judgment?

Am I living my life if I believe in that judgment? So secondly, judgment is horrible. So along with the certainty with which this will come, we need to better recognize how horrible this judgment is. Now language, of course, is difficult to read, and it's a little bit hard to interpret, but I want to be clear this morning. The evil thrown into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

I don't really want to think about this too much. I don't really want to talk about it too much. But you know, Jesus said it twice in this chapter.

[34:44] And so we need to be faithful in figuring out what exactly is this meant? What exactly is meant by this discussion? Now the evil aren't just the worst of murderers and wicked rulers or thugs or terrorists.

No, the evil is all of us. The Bible in so many places reminds us that we are born sinners, rebels against a holy, good, and righteous God.

And it's our rebellion against Him that is our first and our greatest sin. So if you're here today and you're thinking, you know, I think I'll figure out this whole Jesus thing on my deathbed.

Or if you think you know better than the Bible and have rejected His Word and you're one who gives you every breath of life, then I have to say, this is what you will face unless you repent and believe in the Gospel, unless you pursue the salvation found only in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now I do not necessarily understand what egg and egg may mean that there be weeping and gnashing of teeth and what sort of illustrative reality is meant by the fiery furnace. The book of Revelation, referring to the same judgment as Jesus when He says at the end of the age, actually calls it a lake of fire.

[36:02] And interestingly, within Matthew, He's quoted using another related term three different times in the parables. He calls the term outer darkness. And each time it's followed by those same words, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The starting point of understanding these illusions, and this again is to use the word hell here as what it's talking about, though it's commonly used, graphically misunderstood term.

The starting point of understanding these illusions is really fire and darkness. And they actually acknowledge their opposition. Because life and light, which is the presence of God, and life-giving water that flows out from God's throne in the new Jerusalem.

So what does it mean for hell to have weeping and gnashing of teeth? Well, we have to remember that where Heaven is, there is no weeping, or mourning, or crying, or pain anymore.

So there's the choice before us. It's really the glory of God's presence. Or the agony of darkness and fire. The agony of His absence.

[37:18] The Kingdom of Heaven is the glory of God's presence, and hell is the agony of His absence. So this morning, friend, if you are within reach of my voice, and you are not one who is treasuring Christ, then I appeal to you.

With the most inviting clarity that I can muster. Hell is real. Jesus talks about it numerous times, as recorded in Matthew. And His warning is that if you reject Him, your treasure will be outside of Him as well.

And if your treasure is outside of Him, then your reward is also outside of Him. The fiery furnace, the outer darkness, the weeping and gnashing of teeth. But Jesus, Jesus offers us salvation. He offers you salvation with no prerequisite. He offers the greatest treasure and pearl in Himself. Don't spend any more of your life chasing after worthless things, pursuing the vanity and foolishness and emptiness the world has to offer you.

Instead, flee to Christ for the true treasure. This is the Kingdom of Heaven applied in here and now.

[38:37] For the follower of the world's idols and philosophies, it's a call to repentance and a taking hold of the greatest treasure. But what about for the believer?

What about for the Christian? What does the Christian gain from these parables? Well, we need to step back and assess the man in the field and the merchant of pearls.

Does our love for the Kingdom, our love of Christ, doesn't resemble the complete abandon and full dedication like these parables' protagonists?

Like laying everything aside, leaving it all behind to follow Jesus. Like nothing is more important, whether temporary or lifelong. So how do we do that?

How do we consider or assess ourselves against such a standard? Well, there may be a number of ways we can approach this, but I'd like to take three categories for our lives that we can assess.

[39:37] One is our time. Second, our relationships. And third, our money. So just play back the last couple weeks of your life as we think about this.

and just start asking, how did I spend my time? How much of my time was focused on myself?

Whether that's the truly unholy trinity of me, myself, and I, or even how focused I may have been on my activities, needs, wants, of my own family, my own circle, my own preferred group.

How often did you spend your time and energy seeking the good of others, serving others here in the church or in the community, especially the good of the gospel in the life of others?

How much of your time was spent talking about your greatest treasure and your place in the kingdom of heaven? And I think about relationships.

[40:43] How have you treated those you know? Family, co-workers, neighbors, many of whom do not know Christ and will spend eternity outside of them and out unless they repent and follow their only hope in Christ.

And then there's even the people that we don't know. So many people. People in the airport or on the train or the bus. New neighbors. customers and clients. Servers at a cafe or restaurant.

So many people that we pass by. Are we treasuring the opportunity we have for them? And then how about money?

Are you driven by generosity or by accumulation? Have I been thoughtful about how I'm spending the gifts that God has given me?

Am I acknowledging God's goodness to me at every swipe of the credit card? If I assess my spending, if I assess my checkbook, I don't even know if we use those things anymore, if I assess my Venmo account or however you spend your money, what does it look like?

[41:55] Are we accumulating things or experiences for our own kingdoms or for the eternal kingdom of heaven? In summary, brothers and sisters, this question I keep asking myself, would I be identified as someone who's given up everything for the treasure of the kingdom of heaven?

Millions of lives were lost over the three centuries of the crusades and the middle ages? And this should remind us that we as humans can so easily misunderstand the kingdom of heaven.

But maybe we, in our time, we aren't misunderstanding it as much as we're actually undervaluing the kingdom of heaven. Of course, not in our works.

We certainly know what we should think or say, but it's in how we actually live out our lives. We have to remember that one day what we have valued will be tested and its worth will be revealed. Now let's be those people who continue to shed impurity and wrong ideas about the kingdom and instead pursue our God who we know is of infinite worth.

[43:19] Amen? Amen. Let's pray. Amen. Gracious Father in heaven, we want to better grasp the truth we see here in this passage.

Jesus telling us what the kingdom of heaven is like. I pray we would be so concerned and occupied with what these parables tell us and so unconcerned with what the world tells us to believe.

Lord, I pray all those here this morning would be like the man in the field of the merchant of the pearls that we might lift you high seeking your glory in this life and being in the glory of your presence for all eternity.

Give us minds and hearts refreshed and renewed by your word in the great name of our treasure our savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen. Thank you.