

Do You Understand This?

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[0 : 00] Well, as you take your Bibles and turn back to Matthew 13, the passage Alida read on page 819, and we come to the last three parables in this section.

Thank you very much for your warm congratulations on my having a grandchild. It was easy. I did very little, really. And I can't wait to go and visit her and Kelsey and Ben.

So now, here is this lovely ending to the seven parables in Matthew 13. And the great thing about Jesus' teaching, as so often, he himself gives the application.

He asks a question in verse 51. He says, have you understood all these things to the disciples?

And we looked a couple of weeks ago.

So this word understand is not a brain, it's not an intellectual thing. It's what marks out the good soil as good soil, hearing the word of God and understanding it.

[1 : 04] And remember, we look back in the Old Testament to that time when King David had taken his neighbor's wife and then murdered his neighbor and trying to get away with it. And the prophet Nathan came to him with a parable.

And as he told the parable, David was understanding it intellectually. Fine, fine, fine, fine, fine. And then Nathan turned and he said, you are the man. And now David understood. And that's what Jesus is talking about here.

It's not just ticking the boxes. It's having something on the heart. It's a recognition that this is about me. But what Jesus' message is the opposite of Nathan's message.

Jesus doesn't want us to grasp how rotten we are or the things that we've done are wrong. Here he wants us to grasp how wonderful he is and the treasure that we have in him.

Because in the end, it's no good believing in our own sinfulness unless we believe that Christ is utterly able to save us and rescue us and accept us forever. So here in this passage, Jesus puts himself forward to us as the thing of highest value, the greatest treasure.

[2 : 17] And he wants us to be honest with him and to think about and reflect on and to line up the things that we treat and that we have in our hearts as most valuable and to compare them to Jesus.

So I ask you this question. What is it that's most valuable? What do you value most highly in your life? Perhaps I could get some people.

No, I won't do that. Yesterday I was visiting a family at St. John's and their three-year-old daughter brought me out her little treasure chest. I said, what's most precious?

She's three. And she opened it up and there were these lovely hair things and goldens. I'm getting used to these things, all these gold things. And in the middle was this little beautiful thing that she brought out and opened up.

And there was a Burt's Bees lip balm stick. That was the most precious thing. I said to her, can I have some? And she said, and then she took the lip balm and went.

[3 : 24] It hurt me deeply. But just think about what is it? I mean, is it a family unity or physical health or peace or harmony?

And I think we often don't recognize what we really value until it's threatened or we begin to lose it. And then there's this uncontrolled anger or anxiety or grumpiness.

And that way we trace through what's valuable. So I have two points this morning. I want to look at the first two parables together. I've called it the great treasure. And in the last parable, the great separation.

We're going to spend most time on this first thing. The great treasure, verses 44 to 46. So important for Jesus that we understand this, that he tells this story twice with a little bit of a variation.

He tells the story about two men who find something of such great value they could never have imagined it. And they're both overwhelmed with such joy and happiness they make a life-changing

decision.

[4 : 29] They go and sell everything that they have so that they could purchase this thing and secure it. Now this is before banks and insurance companies existed.

And if you made a lot of money or if you got treasure, you accumulated treasure somehow, the best way to keep it was to bury it in some unmarked field somewhere.

The problem is, after you die, nobody knows where it is. So the first guy is walking along through a field one day and he catches his sandal on something.

And he clears the ground and bang, there is unimaginable treasure in front of his eyes. Coins, gold, jewel, we don't know what it is.

Notice please that the treasure is hidden in the field. Just as Jesus' true value is hidden from the world. Blind to the value of Jesus' worth.

[5 : 27] The world looks at the church as an abandoned field. Can't imagine there'd be anything of true value here. The kingdom of heaven is hidden from the wise and learned but revealed to little children.

He's utterly captivated and overwhelmed. He's under the spell. He looks at this, he says, this is more than I could ever have dreamed for in my life. And he covers it over and in his ecstasy he goes and he sells everything he has so that he can legitimately grab a hold of this field and buy it. And notice please in verse 44, he does it in his joy. This is no sacrifice to sell everything else. It's no hardship.

He just wants to get his hand on this treasure. And Jesus says, that's what the kingdom of heaven is like. A second man is a wealthy man. He's a pearl merchant. And he's searching out for beautiful pearls.

In those days, pearls were at least as valuable as gold. And one day he finds the pearl of all pearls. And he too is overwhelmed by the beauty and value of this pearl.

[6 : 32] He's mesmerized. He's dazzled by the magnificence of it. And he too goes and he sells off all his other pearls and everything he has so that he might have it. Now, in 2019, you don't have to be a financial advisor to know that this is a stupid decision.

It's absolutely crazy. Completely impractical. What use is having one pearl of great treasure, even if it's the biggest and most valuable in the world?

What use is it? And I think Jesus is pushing us to ask the question very reverently. What use is he? What use is Jesus to us?

I mean, there's so much in this world and in our lives that's precious and valuable to us. Our families, our friends, granddaughter, the holidays we share. You know, we live in Vancouver. The fantastic experiences, mountain biking, skiing, the respect of our friends, the sense of a job well done. But every one of these things that we value, every one of these good things in our lives has two fatal flaws.

[7 : 43] Number one is they can only satisfy a tiny corner of our hearts. The best marriage in the world, the affirmation of success, it only fills a tiny space in our hearts.

Because we were made by God and we've been given in our hearts the dignity of our maker. A greatness that the whole universe itself cannot contain and cannot fill.

And the Bible's view is that we were made by God and we were made for God. And that we will always be dissatisfied until we have him as our true treasure. So none of the precious things in our lives are sufficient for our limitless desires.

That only comes from resting on God himself. And of course, there are lots of answers to this today, aren't there? Lots of alternatives. Buddhism says, yes, deny your desires. That's the way to deal with all those desires.

The Vancouver response is to say, Lissa, you know, answer. The answer is inside me. Remake yourself until you're happy. And the Bible response is, you have to listen to the desires, but don't settle for anything less than Jesus Christ.

[8 : 50] Only he can fill the human heart. And the second limitation that these valuable things have is that everything in this life can be taken away from you.

And if something can be taken away from you, it was never yours in the first place. But if there's someone or something that can fill you with new life now, can take you through death and can welcome you with open arms and offer you eternal glory on the other side, that's a pearl of great price right there.

And I was thinking this week, that's what Jesus offers permanence. But I was thinking, Jesus can give us all sorts of other things beginning with peace.

So just with one letter, I made a list of the valuable, useful things that Jesus can do for us. He can give us the presence of God, pardon from sin, peace with God and others.

He gives us provision of daily bread, protection from Satan and death, promise of glory in heaven, participation in the life of God, perfection of his grace, the purpose in life to seek his kingdom first, a pathway through life of wisdom and joy.

[10:00] And I've just, there's just a couple. How valuable is Jesus though? Nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus.

Nothing, nothing in all creation, height, depth, powers, Satan, temptations, sin, angels, things present, things to come, height, depth, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

He gives us permanence. But here's the thing, the true value of Jesus is not really what he can give us. Our true value is Jesus himself. It's not what he can do for us, but it's him.

Because we can't separate Jesus' power or his love from Jesus. We can't take the blessings Jesus gives us of all these peas and all these other things, his saving death and his grace, and just leave him out of the picture.

He is the pearl of great price. He is the thing of most value. This is the way the Bible thinks, you see. Back in Psalm 73, one of my favorite verses, the psalmist says, Think about that.

[11:14] Who do you have in heaven that's better than God? I mean, heaven is full of very impressive creatures. Don't get me wrong. Much more impressive than we could possibly imagine. We'd bow down before them.

But the psalmist says, I have none other in heaven that I desire more than God. In other words, if God were to say, Look, here's heaven for you guys. Here's eternal life.

You can be forgiven and have eternal life. But I'm going to move over here. I'm going to withdraw to another place. That wouldn't be heaven. That would be a form of hell. Because what makes heaven heaven is God himself.

It's not heaven unless his presence and his pleasure is there. That's why we pray with the psalms again and again. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I come to his presence?

Do not hide your face from me. But Jesus says more than that. He says both men sell all that they have to gain their treasure. Which means not just that Jesus is more valuable than everything else in this universe.

[12:16] But he's also worth sacrificing everything for, for joy. He's not saying we can buy our way into heaven, of course. We have to receive the kingdom of heaven like a child, poor in spirit.

It's a gift from his hand. And Jesus does not give the kingdom of heaven to those who are specially sacrificial. He gives it to everyone who wants it. Who really wants it.

But seeing Christ and his kingdom and his love for us, it changes our relation with everything else that we value. Everything else, no matter how important to us, now we see in the light of Jesus Christ.

And what a relief it is when we do that. I mean, take marriage, for example. The romantic myth that's currently going around about marriage puts such heavy and weighty expectations on your spouse that we're setting ourselves up for failure right from the start.

So I did some research this week in pop music. It's not my usual style. There's a current pop song that said, a guy sings, you can be my everything.

[13:24] Radiohead, which is slightly more tasteful. They sing, you are all I need. And for those of you over 35, Barry White. There's an old Barry White song. You're the first, you're my last, my everything.

And the answer to all my dreams. You're my sun, my moon, my guiding star. Girl, you're all I'm living for. Your love I'll keep forevermore. Barry White died 16 years ago.

I mean, it's absolutely ludicrous, isn't it? And if you go into marriage with those sorts of expectations, you're going to suffocate your partner. But if Christ is all I need, if Christ is the one who can truly fulfill my needs, it makes me free to hold on to my needs and serve the needs of my spouse, to give myself sacrificially.

Before we leave these two little parables, I just want to point one more thing out. Both of these men are captivated by the treasure before they go and sell anything.

This is very important. It's impossible for us to put our lives in order, to put our loves in order until we know how deeply loved we are.

[14:37] I cannot admit how I give my heart to distraction and deception until I feel the forgiving power of Christ and his grace toward me. I just can't do it. And we never, never have the courage to face the darkness of our own sin until I can see how perfectly and powerfully and eternally accepted I am by Jesus Christ.

That's what I pray for day by day. And you can please pray for me, that I would see and savor and rest myself more on how Christ fills my needs.

Find my treasure in him more and more. And I've told this story before. It's the story of a store in New York the day before Christmas. It's a true story from about 30 years ago.

And two men broke in. And instead of stealing things, what they did is they took all the price tags, the labels, and swapped them. So things of great value became very cheap.

And things that were cheap became things that were very expensive. It's a brilliant picture of our world that we have taken what's really valuable and undervalued it. And we've taken all these things that don't really have any value.

[15:43] And we've made them into the highest value. And we serve them and bow down before them. And Jesus comes and he says, Here I am. I am offering myself to you as the thing of great value.

The kingdom of heaven has come. I'm offering you the one great treasure and it's me. So that's the first point, the great treasure. The second point is the great separation.

And here we come to this very somber parable. The parable of the net, verses 47 to 50. Jesus likens the kingdom now to a net, a sane net, a drag net.

Floats on the top, has weights on the bottom. And it catches absolutely everything in its path like a curtain. It's interesting, isn't it? I mean, as we've been going through these parables, the kingdom can look weak and small and powerless.

But Jesus says it is gradually moving through the world, slowly, perfectly, unstopably, invading every part of creation until the day when the kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of our God and of his Christ.

[16:48] And from God's point of view, that means that what's happened in this last seven days, the most important things that have been going on are not in Ottawa or in Vietnam or Kashmir or Nepal or Nigeria.

But they're the movement of the kingdom of heaven in Ottawa, Nepal, Kashmir, Nigeria, and the progress of the kingdom of heaven in your life and in my life.

The very serious thing Jesus says here is that when the net is drawn in, the fish will be separated and sorted depending on whether we have Christ as our treasure.

Verse 49 and 50, let me just read these words again to you. The idea of separate is to break things apart so they don't have any relationship anymore, no going back with a big gap between them.

And Jesus is talking here of final judgment. Now why does he do this? Why does he do this particularly after two such happy parables? And I think the answer is precisely because Jesus is the thing of infinite value.

[18:11] See, we don't like these binary descriptions of evil and righteousness. We know our own hearts. And so we want to create a middle ground. And the kingdom of heaven comes along and it takes away the middle ground.

And it shows us that God himself regards Jesus as the most precious thing in all creation. And you know that through the scriptures every judgment of God is perfect and perfectly fits the crime. And since the Lord Jesus Christ is at the center of God's purposes and since he is the king of the kingdom and since he has come to die for us and to raise and to rule for us, to reject him is infinitely offensive to God.

He takes it personally. It's a monstrous thing to turn our backs on Jesus if he really is of infinite value. It's a wickedness to refuse to see Jesus as the most precious thing and to live for all sorts of things that he might have given us.

And in the end, God will not force us to follow his son. But if we choose to move away from his son, he will give us what we want forever.

[19:21] And the language of fire, I don't think, is literal because the other times Jesus speaks of eternal judgment in Matthew, he usually speaks of outer darkness.

So they're pictures. And the weeping and gnashing of teeth, I think, describes a sense of regret and rage. It's a sense that the door of the kingdom of heaven has been closed.

The time to turn back to Jesus Christ is past. And it's a recognition of something of what has been missed out on. And that God has given us what we choose.

And so this is just a continual, unresolved anger forever. And I think since these are the words of Jesus Christ, we have to say to each other that hell is a real thing.

And I think it is a genuine motive to come to Christ. But it is an inadequate thing to sustain us in the Christian life. Because it reduces the Christian faith to a kind of a transaction with Jesus, a spiritual deal where he does the saving if I put my faith in him out of fear.

[20 : 30] It's almost the opposite of treasuring Jesus Christ as the most valuable thing. I have a friend who became a Christian in her teens, terrified of the vision of hell.

And she struggled with fear for years and years and years. Fear that she wasn't walking straight. Fear that she might miss out. And when it came to sharing her faith, she was allergic to talking about anything to do with accountability before God.

But over the years, what happened with her, the change to her was that she came to see Christ as the thing of most value.

She came to love him and to see and to love him for who he was, not just because he was her safety. I mean, this is the way Christ wants for us, isn't it?

Phones should be turned off, I'm sorry. This is very important stuff. I mean, what sort of marriage would it be if I said to my wife, I love you, Bron, because I'm afraid of the consequences if I don't.

[21 : 36] Which I am. But it's not a good motive to keep going, is it really? And Christ has come for us and he wants us to see how much he loves us and the value that he has for us.

And so here comes the question, do you understand this? And the disciple says, yes. Yeah, they say, yes, we understand this. And so verse 52 gives us a final little picture.

He says, therefore, every scribe who has been disciplined for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a house who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. So when you have friends into your house, you show them treasures, new and old.

I had a friend over in January and I showed him two boxes. One is about the size of this thing. It was my grandfather's. He had it in Africa. It became my father's and he took it to Africa. It's a little writing desk where he used to keep his will and all those sorts of things.

And after my mum died last summer, I brought it back here to Vancouver. And it has value to me. I wanted to show him. And I have another box at home which was made by Bill Thomas.

[22 : 41] And it was given to me last September in the 25th anniversary celebration here. And it's full of letters written by you in the congregation. And it's precious to me for other reasons.

And here's the thing. I mean, there's no end to the depth of treasures in Jesus. All the treasures of wisdom, all the riches of wisdom and knowledge of God are in him.

And as we come to value him more each day, we grow in our grasp of these treasures in grace.

And you revisit old truths and you discover new truths. If you're an older Christian and you've been on the path for a long time, you have so many proofs of God's kindness and providence to you that he can be trusted above all things.

You should reflect some of that sweetness to other people. If you're grumpy, you need to repent.

And in the face of death, Jesus is uniquely precious.

He's more precious than in medical technology. He's more precious even than family and friends.

The one who made us for himself, who's cut the way through death, who's experienced it for himself.

[23 : 52] And he's waiting for us on that side. And he's waiting to say, well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into my joy. Or maybe you're someone who is following Jesus, but you're being tempted to leave Christ and wander off into sin.

And to treat something else as more valuable than him. Look at what you're giving up. I mean, you may be thinking of ditching your spouse for a younger, leaner version.

And apart from the pain and desolation you create, and apart from your temporary high, and I promise you it will be temporary, even apart from being excluded from the kingdom of heaven, you lose the pearl of greatest value.

You trade the one who is most precious for something that will lead to weeping and gnashing of teeth. Perhaps if you're someone who needs encouragement to continue and follow Jesus Christ,

and you're facing things that are almost unimaginable for others in the congregation, and you've prayed and nothing seems to change.

From here you need to learn to take out of the treasure what is new and what is old. It's all in him. Or maybe you've just started out on the Christian life. There's so much richness ahead of you.

[25 : 07] I wish I was in your shoes in a way. Yet the key to the Christian life is not in you. It's in him. And so we pray, his kingdom come, his will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

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

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