

Batter My Heart

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening everyone. If you're joining with us for the first time, hello, my name's Aaron. I look after the service. I'd love to meet you afterwards. Come and say hi. We're doing a series in Matthew, and today I want to zoom in on just the first two short parables.

They're just a couple of sentences, the one about the hidden treasure and the one about the pearl, but it's like they're two really great little stories packed into just a couple of sentences.

So let's look at the first one then. So there's this guy. He's in a field. Maybe he's going for a walk. I don't know. Walking along. Perhaps he sees something shiny on the ground. Stubs his toe on it. And he starts, you know, he gets in the dust. He starts, he finds this box and he opens up. It's kind of like the end of, you know, the Pulp Fiction when they open up the briefcase and there's like his all glowing gold.

It's like, wow, and he covers it up. He's looking nervously around, covering it back up. Because it's a box of treasure. It's a box of gems, a box of gold that he's found.

[1 : 06] You periodically hear stories of people finding treasure today. It's really uncommon, but every now and then you hear one. There's a 13-year-old kid and found a stash of gold in Germany last year.

The experts said it belonged to this 10th century Danish king called Harold Bluetooth, who was incidentally a Christian, actually.

Fun fact, the wireless Bluetooth standard is named after him. So he had a bad tooth and it was bright blue. And the inventor of the wireless Bluetooth system had this Viking heritage and apparently this Danish king was a unifier and brought people together.

So anyway, fun fact, forget about it instantly. Let's get back to the Bible. So, yeah, people find treasure. It's not very common. Back in the days, it was actually more common for this to happen. Because, remember, they didn't have banks or safety deposit boxes back in the day. So if you had precious stuff like gold, where do you put it? And people would, like, put it in the grounds.

[2 : 14] Maybe hide it in the house. Put it in the grounds. Put it in the backyard or in a field they owned. And you remember, you know this, that back in the days people just died on just, you know, all the time.

War or famine. Like, you know, they get taken away. I don't know. Like, people just disappeared. And so there was quite a bit of stash, you know, just lying around, sitting in a cave, buried in the ground for people to find.

So back to the story. So this guy is in the field. He finds it. He doesn't have a ton of cash. He can't just buy the land. Because he wants to make sure that he gets this thing.

So he thinks, to absolutely make sure that I maintain possession of this thing and I found I'm going to just buy the plot. So he sells everything to buy this field to secure the ownership of the treasure. And you might be thinking, shouldn't he have told the landowner? Like, maybe split it 50-50.

Wouldn't that be the moral thing to do?

[3 : 23] Here's the thing about parables, though. They're a particular genre, right? You can't press the details too much in these things. They generally just have one idea. One main point, which we'll get to. So the worker sells all he owns.

He liquidates everything he's got. He impoverishes himself to get this treasure. Because he knew that this thing that he'd found was worth so much more than what he had already.

And I love verse 44. It says, In his joy he goes and sells. He sold all his stuff joyfully. Isn't that wonderful? Even before he got the benefit of the treasure, he had joy.

Now what's the point? The point is not that you can buy your way into the kingdom. The point is not that you can somehow buy your way into the kingdom.

The point is this. There can be a treasure that is so valuable, that is so wonderful, it is worth selling everything you own in order to possess it.

[4 : 28] There is something that is so perfect and so beautiful, it is worth losing everything for it. This, Jesus, is what the kingdom of God is like.

Next parable. Sort of a similar story. He's a merchant. Verse 45 here. Who sells, sort of specializes in pearls. He's on the hunt for more pearls. That's kind of like his thing, where he's just looking around for pearls.

Pearls, back a bit. Like pearls, pearls, shmurls today. But it's because we can synthesize them. We can make them, right? But back in the day, pearls were worth a lot more money than they are today. So I was researching about pearls.

That's what you pay me to do. And Cleopatra. So I've read this story in a number of different places. Because Cleopatra once had a bet with Mark Antony, who was her lover, that she could host a more expensive dinner than he could.

Which is a terrible bet to make, but this was the bet. So she was up first. So she, you know, they're having a nice meal. So she orders this kind of vinegary sort of drink.

[5 : 38] Puts it on, like, in this big chalice, you know. Plonks it on the table. And then she takes off one of her pearl earrings and drops it in the drink. And waits for it to dissolve. Wait for it till it's dissolved.

And then she just skulls it, throws it back. And it's quite a well-attested story. Because these earrings that she was wearing were very famous pearls. They were, at the time, the largest pearls they'd ever discovered in the world.

Something like \$30 million a pearl. So she won the bet. Back to the story. So pearls. Big deal in the ancient Near East. So this merchant finds a pearl, like Cleopatra's earring-sized pearl, right?

And it's the most magnificent pearl he has ever seen. And he sells everything he has to buy it. Like, everything. He's got his own little box of treasures stashed in some field.

He digs it up. He opens it up. And he's selling everything. He's selling the vintage Rolex watch that his grandfather passed down to him. His great aunt's engagement ring.

[6 : 43] Just insert whatever would be very precious to you. Because he knows, and he believes, and he thinks that nothing is worth hanging on to if it means missing out on this pearl that he's discovered.

Okay, what does this all say to us? These two parables. What are they trying to say to us? It tells us that the gospel, two things. It tells us that the gospel is more beautiful and more demanding than we know.

It is more beautiful and it's more demanding than we know. Now, why do I say demanding? It's demanding because it demands everything. If you're following Jesus, and you might not realize it at this point, if you're following Jesus, if you choose Jesus, this means your whole life.

Jesus wants your whole life. Christianity can't just be, you tack on Jesus as some spiritual thing that possesses some aspect of your life.

It's your whole life following Jesus. It could mean looking at everything you have and saying, I will willingly suffer the loss of this thing to have Jesus.

[8 : 03] For example, I'll just give you one example. This might not happen to you. I hope it doesn't happen to you, but it might not happen to you. It could mean the loss of reputation.

See, because that could be a treasure for some people, right? That could be just everything to them. Let's say you're at an event and people start talking about faith in the Bible and someone says, Well, no one really thoughtful believes any of that stuff anymore, do they, of course?

That means putting up your hand and go, Well, actually, I believe that. The gospel demands everything.

It means we're willing to sell everything for Jesus. Even something like a reputation. The gospel is demanding and it's beautiful. It demands everything.

You're willing to give it up because it's so beautiful. Because you look at Jesus and you think, There is nothing more beautiful than Jesus and what he has done for us. There is nothing I want more than Jesus.

[9 : 09] There is nothing I want more than Jesus. There is nothing I want more than Jesus. John Dunn was a 16th century poet and Church of England minister. He was an Anglican priest. Let me read a few lines that I love from one of his most famous poems.

Let me read a few lines. Let me read a few lines. Let me read a few lines. Answer my heart, three-person God. For you, as yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend.

That I may rise and stand. Overthrow me and bend your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new. But I am betrothed unto your enemy.

Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again. Take me to you, imprison me, for I, except you enthrall me, never shall be free, nor ever chased, except you ravish me.

I love these last lines. I read them to you again. Take me to you, imprison me, for I, except you enthrall me, never shall be free, nor ever chased, except you ravish me.

[10:22] Do you see what he's saying here? If you don't feel like you can give your whole life to Jesus, you need Jesus to ravish you, using John Dunn's words here, which means you need Jesus to capture you and fill you with such delight and joy that everything else looks pitiful and shallow.

And you might think, yeah, I'm not really there. I'm just not there. And that's okay. This is the direction you want to go in.

This is where you want to head. And actually, heading in this direction, it's a sign that you're maturing in your faith. And practically, what does this mean? If you're looking for a takeaway, it just practically means is you keep coming to Jesus, and you keep learning about Jesus, and you keep thinking on who he is and what he has done for you.

And so you're just sort of completely enraptured by that. Now, what would be some signs, if you're actually heading in the other direction, what would be some signs that Jesus is not your absolute treasure, that you're not willing to sell everything for him?

I'll write down a couple here. It could be that you see Jesus more as a resource than a Lord.

[11:45] I mean, faith for you could be like, oh, I just want God to turn up and, you know, get me through my bar exams or help me, you know. I want a boyfriend or a girlfriend. That's kind of really what I want, Jesus.

Resource Jesus. Dear resource Jesus. I mean, those are fine prayers. You can, you know, pray for that stuff. They're good desires, but it's a sign of maturity.

One scholar put it like this. It's a sign of maturity that, here's what they said. They said, religious people find God useful. Growing Christians find God beautiful.

Religious people find God useful. Growing Christians find God beautiful. That's one sign that Jesus is not your treasure. He's just a resource.

Let me give you another one. Another sign would be, in your view, in your view of God, you have quite small ambitions.

[12:42] You come to God and you say, God, would you tweak a few areas of my life? Just tweak him a bit. God is saying, I've come to make you a palace.

I've come to put my very life in you. This is not just a self-improvement thing we're doing here. I've come to make you completely new. Another sign that God is not your treasure.

You simply have other loves. You simply have other loves. Sex, money, power, the fear of missing out.

And the way to overcome these things, see, what we try and do is, if these things are really big deals, what we tend to try and do is we tend to try and suppress the urges, right?

We sort of push them down. We sort of, we think to ourselves, God, I'm going to try really, really hard not to do bad things or think bad things or give my heart to bad things.

[13:47] And it often doesn't work because, see, the trick here, what these parables are pointing us to is it's not so much less sin. The goal is not so much less sin. The goal is more God, falling in love with God more.

So how do you rid yourself of these other treasures that you've given your heart to? Thomas Chalmers was a Scottish preacher in the 19th century.

His most famous sermon was called, The Expulsive Power of a New Affection, which is pretty much this whole sermon, really. The Expulsive Power of a New Affection. Let me give you two lines from it.

The best way of casting out an impure affection is to admit a pure one. The only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one.

Do you see what he's saying here? The key to Christian growth is to be continually overwhelmed by the goodness of beauty in God. If it's not so much less sin, it's more God.

[14 : 52] The way to get rid of an old is love something else more. I'm going to finish up here. You're looking for a one-line takeaway?

Jesus is better than everything else. That's it. Jesus is better than everything else. He is better than comfort.

He is better than ease. He is better than sexual freedom. He is better than wealth. He is better. And being better leads Christians to do seemingly ridiculous things. Christians move cities to start churches. They adopt children with special needs when they already have a full house. They forfeit jobs that would require them to sacrifice their integrity. They give to others at a cost to themselves financially.

[16 : 01] They risk being labelled foolish and ignorant because of what they believe. They get involved in messy relationships. They get involved in messy relationships and difficult relationships.

Even when it would be easy just to let that relationship go. Because God is a God of reconciliation. And why do we do these things? Because Jesus is better.

Folks, make Jesus your treasure. Amen. Amen.