

How Much is the Kingdom of Heaven Worth?

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[0 : 0 0] Welcome. On behalf of Stornway Free Church, let me welcome you, wherever you are today, to our live stream service. We are thankful to God for this technology that enables us to maintain a gospel service in these difficult times. May we together know today the unifying power of God's grace and mercy and peace through the Holy Spirit. And do join us again if you can this evening. We have a live stream going out at 6.30 tonight as our evening service.

So let's begin by reading, first of all, with reading from the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament. That's in Proverbs chapter 3 and verses 13 to 18.

Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding. For the gain from her is better than silver or gold, and a profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her hand, and in her left hand are riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her. Those who hold her fast are called blessed. Let's now call upon God in prayer. Let's join together in prayer.

Our gracious God, we thank you today for your day, which while we are not able to be together as we usually do, yet we thank you for the way that we have joined together in the bonds of the gospel, and especially for the way that your Holy Spirit binds your people together throughout all parts of the world. And we give thanks today, O Lord, that we are able to share together in the gospel, and in the praise of your name, and in calling upon you in prayer, as we seek to do through this service. We pray for all others likewise, O Lord, who are today engaged in worship as we are here.

[2 : 0 5] We do pray that you would accompany your word today. Your word that goes forth is not itself dependent on any technology or any means that we use to disseminate it or to preach from it.

We bless you that your word is in your own hand, that your promise is that your word will not return to you empty. It will accomplish that which pleases you. We pray today that it will accomplish in our own hearts the sanctification of our persons, the information that we receive being blessed to our minds.

We thank you today, O Lord, for this Sabbath day, for the Lord's day, and for the way in which you have set it apart for us to be a day in which we can concentrate our minds on those things that have to do with your glory and with the things that are so important for ourselves spiritually. And we ask, O Lord, that you would help us to rest in you today, that spiritual rest, that peace of heart that you give to those who trust in you. Your promise is that you will keep them in perfect peace, whose mind has stayed upon you because it is in you that they trust. Lord, we ask that you would grant blessing to all your people today in their confinement, in the circumstances we find ourselves in, for we know that this is something which we have throughout the world. And we pray today, O Lord, for those who have more difficult circumstances than we ourselves have. We pray especially for those nations where the virus has taken hold most keenly and has spread to many people and who have experienced so much death.

Remember, we pray, Spain and Italy, especially at this time, be with us, Lord, ourselves as a nation as well. Help us as we find ourselves in lockdown to concentrate on those things that are most important to us.

We pray again for those who sit over us in government. We, Lord, would not want their task at any time. And we pray especially at this time for them, that you would give them wisdom.

[4 : 18] We pray for the Prime Minister and for Mr Hancock, who are themselves laid aside with this virus. We pray for them, O Lord, amongst all the burdens they have, that you would continue to uphold them and bless them and make their time of confinement a means of blessing to themselves.

But especially we pray that you would help them to lead the nation at this time. We ask that you would watch over them and keep them through this time of crisis. Remember the First Minister in Scotland and our government as well.

We pray that you bless them and ask that you would unify all our politicians together in one mind at this time so as to concentrate, O Lord, on those things that you have brought to us in your providence.

Remember us then, we pray today, throughout this day. And all that we do, we commit to you and ask that your blessing will follow. For we ask all of these things, seeking pardon and cleansing from all our sin.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. We're now going to read once again a short passage from Matthew 13 and verses 44 and 45.

[5 : 28] It will be the basis of our thoughts this morning. Matthew 13 at verse 44. We pray God will bless these two passages we've read today from his word.

Now I want to say a word to the children at this time. And it's about the blue tits that are actually building a nest just outside my study window.

For the past couple of weeks, I've been watching these little birds, these two blue tits coming back and forth to the nest box. It's attached to a tree quite close to my study window. Now Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount to learn from the birds.

So I want to tell you two things that I've learned from watching the blue tits. And I thought you would actually want to know this as well. The first thing is how busy they are.

So many times every day they come back and forth from that little nest box, busy building a new nest inside. Ready for the eggs to be laid and a new family of chicks to be reared.

[6 : 54] Bring bits of grass, moss, feathers, things to make the nest with. And nothing is more important to them just now than making this nest ready. Also, they're both equally busy.

They help one another with the task of building this nest. They share equally in the work. And that's how it should be for us too at all times, not only just now when we're not able to be in church as we used to.

All the time we need to seek to help one another. Now the verses in the Sermon today in Matthew 13 speak about the Kingdom of Heaven where Jesus is King.

Nothing is more important for us than serving Jesus in the Kingdom of Heaven. We can do that in our own homes even if we're not able to go out very much just now.

Because serving the King of Heaven is really about how we live our lives in obedience to Jesus. And like the blue tits, we need to help one another with that.

[7 : 55] We look after each other. We pray for one another. And even now as we meet together by video, we're joining together and sharing together in the worship of God.

The second thing I noticed about them was the safety that's so important to them. Now I placed the box quite high up in the tree so that cats wouldn't be able to climb up and go for it.

Blue tits don't take any notice of Roscoe because they know, I'm sure, that he can't climb trees anyway. So they just forget about him. But even though the box is very high, the blue tits still make sure every time they come to the box that there are no crows or seagulls nearby.

You can see them looking around before they actually go into the box through the wee hole that's in it. Because they know that seagulls, crows, other birds like that, bigger birds, are enemies they would want to attack the nest.

Now our safety is also very important to us. At the moment we need to keep safe from this coronavirus. So we need to follow advice from the government as to how to keep safe and that's very, very important.

[9 : 05] But even more important is our spiritual safety. God is spoken about in the Bible as being our refuge and Jesus our saviour. So that we are kept safe from God's anger against sin and from the devil's hatred of God's people.

The Bible assures us that we are safe when we trust in Jesus and have him as our friend. But we must pray to God every day to keep us safe.

So let's now say the Lord's Prayer together. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. Now we're going to give some thought to two parables that we find in Matthew 13 verses 44 and 45.

[10 : 19] I'm sure you've all seen one or other of these programs. Programs like Flogged, for example, in which people take what they know or hope are valuable items, usually antiques.

Take these two experts who put a value on them and sometimes then they're sold at auction. It's always interesting to watch the reaction to the valuation that the experts put on the item that they brought in.

Sometimes it's total surprise if the item turns out to be worth more than they actually thought. Sometimes, though, even though they try and hide it, you can tell it's obvious disappointment.

If the item turns out to be less valuable than they had hoped for, it's understandable. You and I would be exactly the same and sure. And these two parables are all about valuation.

How much is the kingdom of heaven worth? Or rather, how much is membership of the kingdom of heaven worth? And equally, how much are we prepared to give up in order to have the treasure of the kingdom of heaven?

[11 : 25] The two parables seem almost identical. They are almost identical, but it's not Jesus repeating the same thing for the sake of emphasis.

If we look carefully, we'll see they're not identical, though they do share a common theme. And it's of discovering the value of the kingdom of heaven. Or, if we want to put it another way, the value we put on possessing these things.

First of all, let's look at the treasure in the field. We're not told that this man was actually looking for treasure. It rather seems that he was not and just came across it.

How, we're not told. Maybe he was digging, maybe he was ploughing. It doesn't really matter. The point of emphasis is that, moved by joy over his discovery, he went and sold all that he had so that he could buy that field and therefore own the treasure in it.

The pressing circumstances in which we find ourselves over the danger and spread of this COVID-19 virus has given us an unexpected opportunity to assess what we see as of greatest importance and value to us.

[12 : 41] What Jesus is telling us here is that the glory and beauty of the kingdom of God and of belonging to the kingdom through faith in Christ as King is such that when we realize this, we must regard all else as no loss at all in order to possess membership of the kingdom.

sacrificing all else for that is seen actually not to be loss, but rather gain. This man didn't hesitate. He didn't spend weeks thinking about whether the field was worth more than his existing resources.

He just went straight out and bought it. Augustine wrote his famous confessions around about 397 AD, just less than 400 years after Christ's death.

And in his confessions, he tells us about his sinful younger days when he lived for all the pleasures that the world could give him, which he thought it would be a foolish loss to give up.

But then he also tells us how he came to know God, how he was converted. He heard the word of God. He took up the Bible and in it he discovered the kingdom of heaven.

[13 : 57] And this is what he wrote in his confessions, just one wee paragraph from it. How delightful did it suddenly become to me to lack all frivolous delights.

And those which I had feared to lose, it was now a joy to forego. Thou didst cast them from me, thou who art the true and highest delight.

Thou who did cast them from me and did enter in their place. Thou who art sweeter than every pleasure. Does that not remind you of somebody else?

Does it not remind you of Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul? Well, in his testimony in Philipians chapter 3, he says something very similar to Augustine.

Speaking of how tenaciously he held on to what he thought was gain, that is, working his own righteousness by trying to fulfil the demands of God's law, he, like Augustine, came to know Jesus.

[14 : 58] So he wrote, But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss, 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 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ.

Both of these men parted with what they once had thought their greatest treasure. Very different in each case, for sure, but identical in the reason for parting with it.

For Augustine, it was the delights, as he called it, of sinful, worldly pleasure. For Paul, it was his self-righteousness. But in each case, the man parted with the dearest thing he possessed, in order to possess Christ.

For us today, that's what Jesus is also telling us. Whether it is covetousness, pride, worldly pleasure, self-righteousness, or whatever else is keeping us from possessing Christ and life in him, these we must part with, in order to have himself.

[16 : 20] And for both Augustine and Saul of Tarsus, this parting was not a painful, reluctant parting with these things. It was the most willing and satisfying thing they had ever done.

And that brings us to the second parable, the pearl of great value. Although we read that the man in this parable was a merchant, who would have been in the business of buying and selling pearls, and knowing all about pearls, would get the impression he was not really in it for the money.

For him, it was about finding that one pearl worth more than any other. For him, it was to have the satisfaction and joy of owning that pearl, to take delight in it as a pearl, and not as a financial investment.

So when he found it, he knew this is it. He fell in love with it. So he sold all that he had in order to possess it.

For him, it wasn't a matter of selling everything in order to have something more valuable, though that may have been part of it. But it was more particularly about selling all, so as to have this particular pearl, and not any other.

[17 : 37] Now, the most valuable pearl in the world at present, I believe, at least that's what Google told me, was found in 2006 by a fisherman in the Philippines.

It was inside a giant clam. Natural pearls usually grow inside oysters sometimes. Mussels are usually oysters. But more rarely they're found within clams, and this was a giant clam.

So, that pearl measures 26 inches long. That's 69 centimetres, for those of you who have long lost imperial measurements.

And it weighs 75 pounds, which is 35 kilograms. Huge! It has the shape of the clamshell on it because it grew inside it.

And it has been valued at \$100 million. Now, I'm sure there are people they could afford it who'd be prepared to pay that vast sum in order to have this pearl as an investment, or just for the sheer joy and satisfaction of owning it.

[18 : 51] But as the song goes, I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold. I'd rather be his than have riches untold.

I'd rather have Jesus than houses or land. Yes, I'd rather be led by his nail-pierced hand than to be the king of a vast domain and be held in sin's dread sway.

I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today. I'd rather have Jesus than worldly applause. I'd rather be faithful to his dear cause.

I'd rather have Jesus than worldwide fame. I'd rather be true to his holy name than to be the king of a vast domain and be held in sin's dread sway.

I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today. So here are two questions these parables leave us with.

[19 : 52] The two most important questions probably. The first one is this. Am I prepared to sacrifice a worldly way of life for the infinitely better life that Jesus is offering me?

And secondly, if I say, yes, I am to that question, is that out of love for Jesus and the kingdom or is it out of something less?

You see, it's not just a matter of finding that Jesus is better than anyone else, through that though that is. It's also finding out and being convinced that Jesus is everything.

Everything is in him. Amen. And we ask God to bless his word to us. Now we're going to close with praise.

We're going to sing together from Psalm 19. That's in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 19 and verses 8 to 11. We're going to sing to the tune Moravia.

[20 : 56] Moravia. David wrote this psalm in praise of God for giving us his word, which he says is more valuable than even gold and sweeter and more nourishing than honey.

Now just join in the singing wherever you are, verses 8 to 11 of Psalm 19. Psalm 19 and verses 9 to 11.

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[23 : 17] Psalm 19 and verses 9 to 11. Psalm 19 and verses 9 to 11. Psalm 19 and verses 9 to 11. Psalm 19 and verses 9 to 11. Do join us again this evening. If you manage that, it's at 6.30, when we'll be having another short live stream.

We'll close this service now with prayer and a little benediction. eternal God, eternal God, eternal God, once again, we give thanks for your word. It points us so clearly to the kingdom of heaven and to the king himself, to Jesus, the king of all the earth, the king of the universe.

we pray, we pray, we pray, we pray, we pray, we pray, we pray, to have him and to know him installed in our hearts as the king of our lives too. We ask for all who have been watching today that your blessing will be with them.

Bless them, we pray, keep them safe. Bless the children who have been watching as well. We ask for them, oh Lord, your protective care, your guidance to them on the way through life.

And now we ask that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit will be with us all both now and evermore. Amen.

[24 : 28] Thank you again for watching.