

No One Like Jesus: Tru Value
By Jason Huff
August 21, 2016
Isaiah 33:5-6; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; Matthew 13:44-53

Our final Scripture reading today is Matthew 13:44-53. May God's blessing fall upon the reading of His holy Word. "[Jesus said,] "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied. He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old." When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there."

There are 2,274 Home Depots in the world. There are 1,840 Lowes. In the world of big box stores, that's who I think of when I need to fix something. But it turns out they are small potatoes. There are over 4,800 Ace Hardwares around, and you know who comes in the biggest, with over 5,000 stores in more than 60 countries? True Value Hardware. I wouldn't have thought it, but it's the truth. Ace and True Value are co-operatives run by owner-operators who buy a local franchise. They are the McDonalds and Burger King of the hardware world!

I've often been fascinated by the name "True Value," sometimes with the "e" on the end of "true," sometimes not. I found lots of grocery stores around the country with the name. But what is the true value of anything? How do you determine what an item's real worth is? 99.9% of the items at any hardware store are worthless to me because I don't need them, no matter what the price tag says. But the ones I do need – to fix the plumbing or a door frame or whatever – when I have a great need, that value suddenly skyrockets.

All this becomes extremely important when we're dealing with our spiritual lives, because how much we value the Kingdom of God determines what we're willing to give up for it. Today's passage ends this particular set of parables we've been studying the last several weeks, and it confronts us and comforts us with the value of the Kingdom of God. Even the variation on last week's parable, the parable of the net, reminds us of the worth of following God. So let's dig into them for a moment.

Jesus uses two parallel parables to teach us about the Kingdom of God, just as the parable of the weeds and the parable of the net are parallels. The first is about a man who finds a treasure in a field. He goes back and joyfully sells all he has so that he can buy the field and own that treasure.

Some folks have argued that it's dishonest – doesn't the man have an obligation to tell the owner of the field what's there? Yet the law of the land defined theft as taking something off of land that didn't belong to you. The man could have bought the field only to have its owner remove the treasure before he gave over the title. Once the land belonged to the man, anything on it belonged to him too. There's no treachery here, especially not when we understand that it's a parable designed to teach us something.

We have parallels in the modern world, too. How many people have spent fortunes looking for treasures hidden in a field like oil or natural resources? A famous pastor told how he invested in some land. One day, a man came by asking if he could test the property. He had tracked a line of coal onto the preacher's land. The pastor allowed it, and the miner found some, but supposedly only an inch deep. Imagine the pastor's surprise when he finally sold the land that a huge mining operation began on his old property not a few weeks later! He didn't know there was a treasure trove under the field he owned.

In the second parable, a merchant who is looking for pearls finally finds one that is just perfect; it's flawless. In an era without fake pearls, this was one of a kind. Pearls were greatly prized in the ancient world; in Revelation, the twelve gates to the new Jerusalem, the city that God creates at the end of the age, are each made from a single pearl. This pearl seller knows what he's found, and so he sells everything else he has to purchase the pearl of great price.

Jesus probably told these two parables because different people are captivated by each one differently. While the stories are very similar, there is at least one important difference. In the first one, the guy out in the field isn't looking for anything. He just happens upon the treasure. In comparison, the merchant has been buying and selling pearls his whole life. It's because of his search that he knows just what a gem he has in the pearl of great price.

Such is the Kingdom of God. Some of us seek faith or hope or God and find Jesus. Others of us weren't looking for religion or faith. By God's will, the treasure found us. The Kingdom of God has all sorts of people in it – people who came running to God, and people who found God while running away from Him. It includes people who truly understand the value of God's Kingdom, and others who only sense what it's worth – enough to give all to be a part of it.

Jesus' parables give an answer to two big questions: why we should give our lives for a kingdom we cannot see, and whether or not the Kingdom can truly be the answer to our search for ultimate fulfillment.ⁱ If the Kingdom is a vast or perfect treasure, how can it not be fulfilling? And how can it not be worth all? If it is anything less, it is not worth our time or effort.

First big thought of the day I want to focus on: *these parables challenge us if our Kingdom of God is too small*. Most people don't value Jesus Christ and become a part of His church. Why? As preacher Matthew Henry wrote, "Many look only upon the surface of the field and judge on that." At a glance, he says, you might see no significant difference between Christ and other philosophers. But, he says, "those who have searched the scriptures, so as in them to find Christ and eternal life (Jn. 5:39), have discovered such a treasure in this field as makes it infinitely more valuable."ⁱⁱ

During the Olympics, there have been tons of ads for a new comedy called *The Good Place*. Here's a description I cobbled together from the Internet: "Eleanor wakes up and finds herself in "The Good Place." Everyone is friendly, and there's frozen yogurt, tons of sun, a lovely guide, and only one problem: she's not supposed to be there. Stuck in a world where no one curses or gets drunk and everyone is always nice, Eleanor is caught between staying in the afterlife or trying to find a way to return to the mundane life she had back on Earth."

That's why our Kingdom of God is too small. We make it into a slightly better version of our own lives. Frozen yogurt and sunshine? Drinking and not having a hangover in the morning? Is this the best we can come up with as a vision of heaven? And in case we think Hollywood just doesn't get Christians, look at what the unbiblical things that many Christians believe about the afterlife – that we become angels sitting on clouds with harps singing forever.

None of those things is even close! While the Bible doesn't describe exactly what happens in the Kingdom of God, it does tell us that there is no suffering or tears. It is pure joy in the presence of God and His people. The description of the New Jerusalem itself goes beyond imagining, with the city itself described as being as huge as most of the United States! We cannot fathom it. What we know from these parables is, it's a treasure beyond treasures, the pearl beyond pearls. Is it "the good place"? Yes, but it is good beyond description, more holy than anything we've conceived, more amazing and incredible than we can dream because it is the dwelling place of the holy God who desires to dwell with us. Heaven is not good because it's heaven; it's good because God is there in His unadulterated glory.

If we are willing to search the Scriptures, to find out who God is and what He has done, we will realize that spending our eternity in His presence is worth every effort, every cost, and every sacrifice. When you study God, you find that He is not like us. He is holy. His judgment is always perfect. His grace is beyond measure. His power is unfathomable and He uses it for our good, and yet in Christ, He sets it aside to be with us and to save us. He is our treasure. He is our pearl. The millions who have given their lives in pursuit of Him knew it, and we can too. If we have the right view of the Kingdom of God, giving ourselves up for it is nothing because we realize we receive far more in return than what we gave up.

This is a good point for us to also note that these parables don't in any way stop salvation from being a free gift. Pursuing God with all we've got isn't to gain the Kingdom of God; it's the natural outflow of having entered the Kingdom through Christ. We can't earn salvation through good works or buy it with every possession we own. It comes to us by God's grace alone. God claims us, brings us to faith, and in many ways wrecks our old lives so that we might do away with the old and lay firm claim to the life that God has for us in Christ.

That leads me to my second thought: *these parables comfort us because we are not asked to do anything that Christ hasn't already done on our behalf*. When we hear these parables, we may balk at how extreme they are. The man in the field and the merchant sell everything they have to gain the treasure. Does this mean we are to go through the rest of our lives broke and homeless? That's not the point of the parable. You can sell everything you have and still not gain the Kingdom of God.

The point is, when we recognize the Kingdom of God for what it is, we'll give up everything – every earthly treasure, friendship, relationship, job, home – that stands in the way of our being a part of it. Our old lives before we understood the Kingdom of God are dead and gone; the hard part is doing the estate sale and getting rid of all the leftovers. As Hebrews 12:1 says, "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

Does it seem like sacrifice? Sure. It isn't easy because we are still in this world; we need things of this world to survive day by day. It's a balancing act that requires us to actively engage in this world while being fully devoted followers of Christ and His new Kingdom. But He asks nothing of us in these parables that we cannot imitate in Him.

At first glance, these parables illustrate our place in the Kingdom of God. We ultimately come upon the treasure of the Kingdom, and as far as our part goes, we withstand the earthly trials of being a follower of Jesus Christ to claim that treasure. Our withstanding the onslaught of the enemy is empowered by the Holy Spirit, but it's still our role to play.

But at another, deeper glance, we realize that the Kingdom of God is not really about us finding God, but God finding us. This parable is true for God as well. We are His treasure. Malachi 3:17 speaks about those who fear the LORD and honor His name, saying, "They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him." Deuteronomy 26 and Psalm 135 call Israel God's "treasured possession." As the adopted children of the true Israel, we are in that group.

To claim His treasure, to claim us, Jesus spared nothing. Jesus, Philippians 2:6-8 says, "being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!" Why? To bring glory to His Father, to save us from eternal death, and to usher us into the Kingdom of God. As you might have heard in Olympic coverage, He left nothing on the field. Every last thing He had, He gave up in order that we could be sons and daughters of the most high God who would spend eternity by His side.

When you are discouraged or troubled and concerned that you can't do it, that it's too much to ask to forsake this world for the next, be reassured that by the Holy Spirit, what He has done, you can do; John 14:12 is Jesus' promise of that: "anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."

Final major thought for the day: *these parables encourage us to stop playing around at being disciples and invest in God's Kingdom.* I believe the reason that Jesus gave us the parable of the net, which is virtually identical to the story of the weeds from last week, was to underline the seriousness of pursuing the kingdom of God. If the difference between being a good fish or a bad fish, part of the wheat or part of the tares, winding up in glory or in hell, is coming into the Kingdom by following Jesus faithfully or rejecting it, then we better make sure we enter the Kingdom of God, and make sure nothing gets in the way.

To be frank, most of us in the American church aren't that serious about being Jesus' disciples. We spend an hour or two on Sundays in worship and fellowship, and maybe a Bible study during the week if we're "dedicated." It might change an attitude here or there; we might try to be a little nicer or a little more thoughtful. But I want to read to you a tiny bit of an address by Aristades, a philosopher who became a believer, given to Emperor Hadrian in 125BC.

He said, describing Christians, "if one of them has [servants,] through love towards them they persuade them to become Christians, and when they have done so, they call them brethren without distinction...they go their way in all modesty and cheerfulness. Falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another, and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly. He who has gives to him who has not without boasting. When they see a stranger, they take him in to their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother. If they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of...their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity, and if it is possible to redeem him they set him free. And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food."ⁱⁱⁱ

Of course, these are only examples, not commands; ideas of how to follow, not fast rules. And yet, how many of us ever give up a meal, let alone fast two or three days so that we can give food to the hungry? Do we show real hospitality to those who need a place to stay? Do we support those in other parts of the world who are imprisoned for our God? Will we take in the refugee who has been kicked out of their country for their faith in Christ?

What helps us do this is one key change of heart: moving from the idea of ownership to the idea of stewardship. When we say, "I own this," we claim it as our own, and we protect our right to use it whenever and however we want. When we say, "all I own belongs to God," then what we have is a gift on loan from God, and we search for ways we can use it in order to please God. As author and pastor Tony Merida writes, "The question is not, "How much money should I give to advance the Kingdom?" but "How much of God's money should I keep for myself?" And not, "What's the least I can do for people?" but "How many people can I possibly have in the home God provided, and how many people can I serve with God's resources?"^{iv}

What would happen if we stop playing at being disciples and just be disciples? We would see amazing changes. More people would be drawn to us after seeing how we live. They would be amazed at how we care for those around us. They might repent and come to know Jesus too. I'm not accusing anyone; only God knows each heart here. But if any of us today here has just been a casual Christian, now's the time to get serious. There's too much at stake.

Jesus' final word this week to the disciples was this: "Every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old." Unlike the people of the Old Testament, unlike some Christians today, we know that we are in pursuit not of a prayer that will get us into heaven or a magic fix that will solve our problems but the very Kingdom of God. We have amazing treasures because we know the Kingdom of God and a relationship with our God and King is beyond all value. Our storeroom is filled with the goodness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let's let nothing get in the way of our pursuit of His ways, His sacrifice, and His Kingdom.

ⁱ Reworked only slightly from Weber, S. K. (2000). *Matthew* (Vol. 1). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

ⁱⁱ Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

ⁱⁱⁱ Merida, T. (2015), *Ordinary: How To Turn The World Upside Down*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, xvi-xvii.

^{iv} *Ibid*, 55.