

***The Parables of Jesus: Pursuing the Kingdom***  
***By Jason Huff***  
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***Psalm 73:21-28; Hebrews 12:1-3; Matthew 13:44-46***

Our final Scripture reading today comes from Matthew 13:44-46. May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word. “Jesus taught them, “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.””

Today, we’re taking a short break from our series on Genesis. In the weeks before Easter, it’s good for us to turn our eyes specifically towards Jesus, His message, His sacrifice, and His resurrection. The entire Bible is wonderful and full of goodness about God, but we never want to lose sight of the fact that a true, living, saving relationship with Jesus is the ultimate goal of faith. All the Bible preaches about Jesus, but some parts more directly than others. During these few weeks, we’re going to be more direct. We’re going to study several of Jesus’ parables together and see what He tells us about the Kingdom of God and about ourselves.

Today we start with two parables Jesus told back to back. There are subtle but important differences between the two. In the first, a guy stumbles across a hidden treasure in a field. He’s amazed at what he’s found. So he hides the treasure away again, and goes and sells everything he has. None of that stuff matters if he can get that magnificent treasure he’s found! And so with the money from all his possessions, he buys the field and is overcome with joy at his find.

Meanwhile, in the second story, we’ve got a pearl merchant, someone who spends all his time looking for rare and valuable finds. He knows what he’s looking for; he’s been searching for beautiful pearls his whole life. In the marketplace one day, he finds the perfect pearl – the perfect color, shape, and luster. He has never seen anything like it. He does the same thing as the man who came across the hidden treasure – he gets rid of all his other stuff. It’s junk in comparison to this fine pearl he’s about to purchase. It will cost him all he has, but the price means nothing to having this pearl that he’s only before imagined in his wildest dreams.

The key difference between these two stories is the first thing I want to focus on today, It’s a wonderful truth for us. It’s this: *the Kingdom of God is ready to be discovered, no matter whether you stumble upon it or have been searching for it your whole life.* I have a good friend who spent almost his entire life going to church. He knew the basics; he could fake it. But it wasn’t until about age 50 or so when he truly got it, when he realized that the love of Jesus was for him and salvation was for him and that living a godly life was what he wanted to do.

I’ve known other people who got invited to a Mothers of PreSchoolers meeting or a Bible study or a church picnic, had never given thought to God at all, and suddenly they were convinced and Jesus became their everything. Some people are in search of the truth, really searching, reading the scriptures of Buddhism and Islam and Hinduism, and then they come to Christianity and they see the beauty and truth of it.

At CrossWay, our goal is to help everyone who walks in our doors or hears the message online to know the Kingdom of God is open to them. We are not a private club with an exclusive membership. You might know every theological term or you might not know a thing. You may have nothing or you may have wealth you don't know what to do with. Doesn't matter your background, your past, your sins. The Kingdom of God is waiting to be discovered; to all who find it and desire it, the gates are open wide.

And that leads me to the second idea I think these parables point out for us today: *you will only claim a treasure if you recognize its value.* There's a recent story about Stefan Thomas, a computer programmer living in San Francisco. Thomas made a video a little over 10 years ago, explaining how money like BitCoin works. Long story short: they are currencies that exist solely on the Internet. Thomas was paid for his video in what was technically worth about \$20,000 in BitCoin at the time, but it was worthless to him, as he couldn't really spend it.

Now ten years later, he could spend it, and those BitCoins he was given are now worth \$240 million dollars. Thomas had no idea what a gold mine he was sitting on. So what did he do? He forgot the password to his digital wallet. He has two more attempts left to get the password right to prove those BitCoins belong to him. If he fails two more times, his digital wallet goes away forever. It looks like Thomas won't be a multi-millionaire after all because he didn't value those BitCoins enough to keep a secure record of his password. I know I've lost my password before, but it's never cost me that much!

But the same thing is true about the Kingdom of God – we're only going to care about it if we understand its value and believe in its value. This is something that many presentations about the gospel miss, and it's of critical importance. The Kingdom of God is not primarily about escaping hell or punishment, though that is a primary motivator for a lot of people.

The Kingdom of God is about receiving the full gospel promises of God. It's about becoming the adopted sons and daughters of God in the here and now. It's about being transformed from the inside out into new individuals capable of pleasing God through our words and actions. It's about *knowing* that you are loved by God both now and always. It's about knowing that what we do is impacting the Kingdom of God spreading in our midst. And it's the promise of a future with God, in His presence, where pain and suffering and death are no more, where we will enjoy God's blessings into a future beyond human comprehension.

I'm not saying everybody here, but most of our visions of the Kingdom of God are weak. We do not see it as a treasure. We have misinformed ideas about what eternity will be like. As those of you who've been with me a long time have heard me say, who studied the book of Revelation with me, we do not turn into angels. We do not have an eternity of sitting in clouds playing harps ahead of us. We have let eternity with God sound boring. Shame on us!

Eternity with God is beyond our grasp to even understand! And yet it has been revealed to us with pictures of a wedding, a bridegroom finally coming for his long-awaited bride. We have visions of a city towering beyond any human understanding, yet where everyone is in a deep, meaningful relationship with God. It is a paradise where we reign alongside Christ and act as priests worshipping God and have good, fulfilling work to do that pleases both God and us!

Every true hope, every good dream, every noble pursuit, every worthwhile endeavor, finds its real fulfillment in the Kingdom of God. It is a treasure that we can barely begin to understand! It's like Thomas and his wallet full of BitCoins – we know it's a treasure even now, but how much of one? The human mind can't even comprehend.

Yet if we're honest with ourselves, most of us don't treasure the Kingdom of God as we should. I think a big reason behind that is that our American lives are relatively OK. Not everyone in America has an easy time of it; there is no doubt of that. There are people who have been left behind. But the poverty rate in America is under 10%, and there is help for those who fall into that category.

At no time in human history have more people had their basic needs met and had easy access to luxuries millionaires in other centuries couldn't have dreamed of. We have to work hard to pay the bills, feed the family, keep the lights on, and yet we have lights! We have heat! We have food! We can sometimes misunderstand or underestimate the treasure of the Kingdom of God because we have so much to amuse and distract ourselves.

Have you ever gone to a buffet line and just helped yourself to all sorts of things, only to notice after you've eaten it all that they've brought out your favorite items? You know it's the best they have, but you've gorged yourself and there's no more room left. I think that may be how we are with the Kingdom of God. We fill ourselves with the stuff of this world, the cheap thrills, the pleasures, the junk food and potato chips of a life that's not pleasing to God, and when the steak comes, the lasagna, the ice cream and cheesecake of the Kingdom, we know we've missed out and there's no more room, and we just feel sick rather than joyful.

Friends, the last thing we want to do is miss the treasure of the Kingdom because we're too much enjoying the pleasures of this world. They are temporary; they don't last. The Kingdom is forever. The pleasures of sin and the world has to offer will fade away. When I was down at my mom's house helping her get back up to snuff after COVID, I did some cleaning out of the refrigerator and the cabinets. Everything from milk to pickles to cereal. Some of them have a long shelf life, but sooner or later, they go bad. They are thrown away. All we treasure that's of this world isn't going to last, just like the Frito Lays we bought three summers ago. But you'll only claim a treasure if you recognize its value. Do you value the Kingdom of God?

Now let's look at another concept of the two parables, probably the trickiest part of them both, and that's how these two – the pearl merchant and the guy who stumbled over a box of loot – were willing to sell off everything they had to buy their special treasures. Not just willing; they just do it immediately, because they know that time is of the essence and something amazing awaits. Nothing is going to stop these two from their awesome discoveries. They aren't worried about the cost because the reward will be so very, very much greater.

Let's think about this for a second: *believing and following Jesus into the Kingdom of God has real costs, but those costs are small in light of the prize that awaits us.* That's why we have to know the true treasure that we have in God. Only the greatest reward is worth the price of following Jesus. True faith will cost us.

Now this goes counter to a lot of false gospels that are out there. So many churches are saying that health and wealth in this world await those who will pray a prayer and say, “I believe.” That’s just not true. Jesus promised in Mark 10:30 that those who left behind everything for Him and for the gospel would receive blessings in this life, but also persecutions. So even giving all doesn’t exempt us from the sufferings of the world!

You might also say, “I’ve been told I’m saved by faith alone. Is the parable saying we need more than faith?” It doesn’t. We *do* believe that we are saved by faith alone, not by works, as Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-9. But that faith has substance far beyond just our brains! It is not merely a mental assent to the idea that God exists or even that Jesus was born of a virgin, died, and was resurrected back to life. It includes that, but merely agreeing that truth is truth doesn’t save you. Saving faith will include action because saving faith means following Jesus, it means we want to follow Jesus, which means obedience to His Word. And that obedience has a cost.

Jesus said anyone who wants to come after Him must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him. That’s the substance of faith. Instead of looking to please ourselves, we live our lives in view of the two great commandments. We ask, “What am I doing today that loves God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, and how am I loving my neighbor as myself?” True faith says, “I am so sure that the treasure of the Kingdom of God is worth it that I will give up my old ways and my selfishness to look after the good of others first.”

It’s not just about what you own, what you do or don’t have. It’s not just about your job and what you do for a living. It’s not just about what you do in the time you aren’t working or studying, making meals, and doing the things that are the requirements of modern life. It’s about all those things, and more I haven’t even mentioned. A real, living, active faith is going to encompass all of it – our whole lives. When we have that kind of faith in Jesus as our Savior, we will start to see the Kingdom of God come alive in us even now. And we will have joy! There is immense joy in knowing the pleasure of God. It drives away fear and anxiety and even some kinds of stress we face, because through it all, we know God is with us and for us.

It might seem nerve-racking to give everything over to God, to fully trust your life and home and finances and job and family to Him, to say, “God, whatever you want, I’ll do. I’m yours.” But it might help to think about it this way...God made you. He created you. He knows you better than you know yourself. You can continue to live your life your way, if you so choose. You can reject God. But because God made you and created you, He is far more reliable a guide to your life than you are. Giving everything over to Him is freeing because you don’t have to be the boss any more. He will guide and steer you.

And we don’t have to worry endlessly that we’ve made the wrong move, we’ve chosen the wrong job, and so God will be angry with us because we didn’t read God’s mind or pick up what we were supposed to do. While it’s amazing how often God speaks directly to people in the Bible, it’s also telling just how often He trusts His people to follow Him without specific instructions beyond what He tells us in Scripture. We ask God’s will in prayer each day, we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done,” and as we pray it, we pray that we might really do His will. We ask the questions about loving God and loving our neighbors, which are guided by God’s direction in Scripture. And we move forward in faith.

To end today, I'm going to tell you the story of a guy who has become my favorite musician by the name of Neal Morse. The guy's amazingly talented. Plays keyboards as his primary instrument, but also plays bass, electric and acoustic guitar, drums – all of them at a professional level. But his story is an illustration of realizing the treasure of the Kingdom of God and metaphorically selling the farm in order to have it.

Neal didn't grow up in a religious home, just a musical one. He spent years grinding out a living as a musician in California, playing gigs here and there, trying to get his shot to make the big time as a singer-songwriter. He spent virtually all the 80s in search of a record deal that never happened. He finally started to get some notice when he started a band called Spock's Beard with his brother.

At the same time, God began to get ahold of him. He got connected to church through his girlfriend (who became his wife), and at first it was a bit terrifying, because he'd never really been to one. He saw his life going in two different directions – he wanted to be home more with his wife and family, yet the road was constantly calling. He started to have faith, but wasn't deeply committed. What really shook him was when their daughter Jayda was born with a hole in her heart. His wife prayed desperately over her and asked the Lord for a miracle...and it happened. They went to do surgery and the hole was gone! After that, there was no more pretending for Neal. He knew what he'd seen. He knew God was real and Jesus was his savior.

Problem was, he felt convicted by God that he needed to leave the band. They'd just recorded a huge double album that was getting good press, and it looked like that big break he'd always wanted. Yet the call of the Lord was really strong and Neal knew he needed to put his life completely in God's hands, so he dropped it all. He wasn't sure if he'd ever play music again. He jokes about having to be willing to be a janitor for the Lord if that's what God called him to.

There was tension for a while, where Neal wasn't sure what he needed to do, but he needed to hand over everything to the Lord – his job, his family, his security. And in 2003, the floodgates opened up. God gave Neal an amazing amount of music, starting with an epic rock album about his conversion to Christianity. And in the last 17 years, Neal has recorded over 30 albums worth of new music, almost all of it about the Christian life. He's not the most famous Christian musician by a long shot, but his music is amazing – we've used some of it in church.

I tell you the story of Neal Morse not just because he's my favorite musician, but because he's someone who saw the beauty and majesty and treasure of the Kingdom of God, and he really did throw in his livelihood, his career, everything, on the line to be a faithful follower of Jesus. It is not a pipe dream. We can do this. Other people throughout history have. Yes, it is hard to give over that control. Yes, it is hard to sacrifice our pleasures for the greater good of God's will and God's Kingdom. But if we see the treasure of the Kingdom of God for what it really is, it will change us, and we will give all to claim it.