

Worth Having, Worth Searching

The Kingdom of Heaven is Like... Discovering the Mysteries of Kingdom Life

Matthew 13:44-46

April 24, 2016

Well, thank you again for being in worship today. What a blessing it is to be together.

I want to invite you to turn to Matthew 13 today as we continue our series “The Kingdom of Heaven is Like... Discovering the Mysteries of Kingdom Life.” Thus far, we have learned.

- We learned from the Parable of the Sower and the Seed first that the kingdom of heaven is for everyone. The Gospel is to go everywhere. The message of Jesus is meant for everyone. No one is not welcome in the kingdom of God, no one is not welcome in the church, despite what we think sometimes.
- Secondly, we learned that it is up to you to cultivate the soil of your soul if you are to be the seed that produces 30, 60 or 100 fold.
- Then we studied the Parable of the Mustard Seed and Leaven, and we learned that the Kingdom of Heaven starts from the smallest beginnings, but no one knows where it will end.

Today, let’s look at two more connected parables that teach us about the Kingdom of Heaven, where God reigns, and Whose kingdom begins right here, right now.

Matthew 13:44-46:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.¹

You know what this story reminds me of? The premise behind the Beverly Hillbillies. Remember the song “The Ballad Of Jed Clampett”?

*Come and listen to my story 'bout a man named Jed
Poor mountaineer, barely kept his family fed
Then one day he was shootin' at some food
And up through the ground came a bubbling crude
(Oil, that is, black gold, Texas tea)*

We probably understand Uncle Jed’s good fortune better than we understand the parables Jesus told, so it helps us to in time to understand the visuals He was drawing from.

Let’s look first at the person finding a hidden treasure.

In the ancient world, there were banks, but not banks such as ordinary people could use. Ordinary people used the ground as the safest place to keep their most cherished belonging. In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, the worthless servant hid his talent in the ground, lest he should lose it.²

This was even more the case in a land where a person’s garden might at any time become a battlefield. Palestine was probably the most fought over country in the

¹ Matthew 13:44-46 (NRSV)

² Matt 25:25

world; and, when the tide of war threatened to flow over them, it was common practice for people to hide their valuables in the ground, before they took to flight, in the hope that the day would come when they could return and regain them.

The person who discovered the treasure hidden in the field stumbled upon it by accident, but knew its value when he found it, and knew he must have it. Although the transaction cost the man everything, he paid nothing for the priceless treasure itself. It came free, with the field. Nothing is more precious than the Kingdom of Heaven; yet God gives it to us as a gift.³

The lesson of this parable is this: it is worth any sacrifice to enter the Kingdom. What does it mean to enter the Kingdom? When you study the Lord's Prayer, you find that we could say that the Kingdom of God is a state of society upon earth where God's will is as perfectly done as it is in heaven: "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Therefore to enter the Kingdom is to accept and to do God's will. So, then, it is worth anything to do God's will.

Suddenly, as the man discovered the treasure, there may flash upon us, in some moment of illumination, the conviction of what God's will is for us. To accept it may be to give up certain aims and ambitions which are very dear, to abandon certain habits and ways of life which are very difficult to lay down, to take on a discipline and self-denial which are by no means easy, in a word, to take up our cross and follow after Jesus. But there is no other way to peace of mind and heart in this life and to glory in the life to come. It is indeed worth giving up everything to accept and to do the will of God.⁴

How many of us are like the person who finds the treasure, who is willing to give everything they have – their hearts, their desires, their minds, their attitudes, their control, their selfishness, their will, their lives – to God in complete submission? I've known many people in my life and in churches I have served who were Kingdom of Heaven citizens, persons who truly loved Jesus and wanted to serve Him and surrender to Him completely.

COMMENT

Let's move to today's second parable and read it again.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.⁵

Like today, in the ancient world, pearls had a very special place in women's and men's hearts. People desired to possess a lovely pearl, not only for its money value, but for its beauty. They found a pleasure in simply handling it and contemplating it. They found an aesthetic joy simply in possessing and looking at a pearl.

The main sources of pearls in those days were the shores of the Red Sea and far-off Britain itself, but a merchant would scour the markets of the world to find a pearl which was of surpassing beauty. There are certain most suggestive truths hidden in this parable.

First, it is suggestive to find the Kingdom of Heaven compared to a pearl. To the ancient peoples, as we have just seen, a pearl was the loveliest of all possessions; that means that the Kingdom of Heaven is the loveliest thing in the world. Let us remember what the Kingdom is. To be in the Kingdom is to accept and to do the will of God. That

³ Life Application Study Bible, Matthew 13:44

⁴ Barclay's Daily Study Bible, Matthew 13:44

⁵ Matthew 13:45-46 (NRSV)

is to say, to do the will of God is no grim, grey, agonizing thing; it is a lovely thing. Beyond the discipline, beyond the sacrifice, beyond the self-denial, beyond the cross, there lies the supreme loveliness which is nowhere else. There is only one way to bring peace to the heart, joy to the mind, beauty to the life, and that is to accept and to do the will of God.

It is also suggestive to find that there are other pearls but only one pearl of great price. That is to say, there are many fine things in this world and many things in which a person can find loveliness. One can find loveliness in knowledge and in the reaches of the human mind, in art and music and literature and all the triumphs of the human spirit; one can find loveliness in serving others, even if that service springs from humanitarian rather than from purely Christian motives; one can find loveliness in relationships. These are all lovely, but they are all lesser loveliness. The supreme beauty lies in the acceptance of the will of God. This is not to belittle the other things; they too are pearls; but the supreme pearl is the willing obedience which makes us friends of God.⁶

In this parable, the Kingdom of Heaven is not the precious pearl, but the merchant. In contrast to the previous parable, Jesus is now displaying another aspect of the Kingdom. The contrast becomes vivid in the transaction – the Kingdom pays the ultimate price to possess the pearl, the price God was willing to pay to redeem us.⁷

Folks, here's the point. You are the pearl of great price.
God gave everything for you.

⁶ Barclay's Daily Study Bible, Matthew 13:45-46

⁷ Life Application Study Bible, Matthew 13:45-46