



## **THE PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE**

Text: Matthew 13:44-46

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What one thing would you love to get your hands on? What would be a real find for you? An absolute treasure if you could get one? How would you feel if you actually managed to get it? It might have to do with a hobby or collection. Perhaps it has to do with sport. You are a cricket nut. What would it be for you? And if you found this treasure how much would you be willing to pay for it? Are you such a fanatic that you would be willing to sell your car for it? Even your house? Everything you have? Would you be so insane? Or would it be just that good a deal? I'm getting you into the setting of our Bible passage. Jesus told a story about a man who was willing to give up everything he had for a pearl. Jesus does not ridicule the man for his decision. He essentially congratulates him. That may seem a bit odd. But when we understand the parable, we get to the heart of what it means to be a Christian. Which is about discovering the greatest treasure of all.

In our text Jesus tells two parables of what "*The kingdom of God is like...*" The two stories that Jesus tells make the same point. Which was the Jewish way of saying 'You really need to listen to this!' The first is the parable of the hidden treasure. Matthew 13:44, "*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.*" This is a situation a lot of people dream about. Get rid of the mortgage all in one go. Wouldn't it be nice? The man just happens to stumble across a treasure. First century Palestine was a land of wars. Often it became a battlefield and houses were looted. In a day in which there were no banks, burying money and valuables was the safest thing to do. The rabbis had a saying for it: 'There is only one safe repository of money- the earth.' Makes more sense than hiding it under your mattress. If the owner died before

he could tell the hiding place to his heirs, the treasure lay hidden and forgotten until a lucky finder discovered it. So imagine a guy ploughing a paddock for a farmer when the plough gets stuck. He probably mutters something about another rock in the field and discovers the treasure. It would have been stealing for the man to simply take the treasure home. But by hiding it again and buying the whole field, the treasure now belongs to him. Jesus does not endorse this as ethical conduct. But he knows the attitude of his audience. The punch line is that in giving up all he had to buy the field was a great move.

Here's the second parable: 13:45-46 "*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.*" Unlike the first fellow who stumbled across a treasure, the merchant has been hunting for fine pearls for some time. Now he finds one with beauty and perfection beyond what he has ever imagined. He knows that this pearl is one of a kind. He sees that the price tag is absolutely huge. But he knows it is still a great buy. He goes back home and sells everything he has and comes up with just enough money to buy the pearl. He makes the purchase and now knows that he owns something worth far more than everything he has ever owned. He is thrilled to bits. Imagine him ecstatically jumping around on his way home.

These are a couple of interesting little stories. So just what is Jesus saying about what the kingdom is like? First we note the earthiness of the stories. It's a man ploughing a paddock, a merchant doing his business. The kingdom of God is not just about when I die and go to heaven. It is here with us now in all the nitty gritty of everyday life. What we do at home or work, or school is kingdom stuff. God is active in ordinary life. We notice also that discovering the kingdom may come as a complete surprise. Out of the blue we might have an accident and are battling, when a work mate or school friend tells us about the grace of God. We weren't looking for it but the grace of God strikes us with a great delightful surprise. Or it may be that we have been looking for some time. We have been wanting to find the purpose and meaning to life. Perhaps we have been doing lots of reading, even in the Bible. What both these parables make clear is that being part of the kingdom of heaven is worth far more than whatever sacrifice you have to make. Even if you had to give up everything to follow Jesus, it would be well worth it. Let's think through some of the implications.

First of all, the cost of following Jesus should not keep us from doing so. We know that around the world many Christians are persecuted for their faith. It should not really surprise us that things like that happen. In 2 Timothy 3:12, Paul warns that *"...everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."* We don't face that sort of cost for discipleship here in Australia, yet. We might be stirred for trying to be good or witnessing for Jesus. But whatever our circumstance and our cost, the parables of the treasure and the pearl remind us that it is worth it. The great missionary, David Livingstone, said, 'Over the years I have given up many things, but I have never made a sacrifice.' In other words, all of the comforts and pleasures which he forfeited by serving God in Africa were nothing compared to the rich rewards he found in Jesus. By devoting his life to serving Jesus, he had a priceless pearl. Paul writes in Philippians 3:8 *"...I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I might gain Christ and be found in him..."*

Maybe you are not sure about being a Christian. You are not sold yet on the idea of committing yourself to God. May I suggest you have not really looked at that pearl. You have not really looked in the box with the treasure. It is truly stunning. It is breathtaking. It is so wonderful we are told in Jesus' first parable, *"When a man found it, he hid it again, and then **in his joy** went and sold all he had and bought that field."* It was out of utter delight that the man gave up everything. If you have found the treasure of being forgiven and reconciled with God you know the cost is worth it. If you have experienced the wonder of being in God's presence and the deep contentment of doing things God's way, then you know its value is hundreds of times more than the cost of discipleship.

Secondly, we should focus our lives on what matters the most. We always seem to have too many things to do. We have never been so busy, running ragged as now in our culture. We often get frustrated because no matter how many things we do, we feel we still have not done anything which really matters. How can we get our priorities straight? How do we even know what they should be? The parables tell of two individuals who did not feel that sense of confusion. They had a very clear purpose. The first thought, 'I am going to do whatever I have to do to buy that field and get that treasure.' He was willing to give up all that he had so he could obtain it. The second thought, 'I'm going to do whatever I have to do to buy that magnificent pearl.'

And he did. They had their sights on a bulls-eye. And nothing was going to keep them from hitting their mark.

We should be just as focused. There is a clear bulls-eye for which we should be aiming each day. What is it? "To glorify God and enjoy him". It's that simple. Our purpose in life is to please God by doing what he wants us to do. It is simple, but not easy. Often it is natural for us, because of our fallen nature, to resist living the way God wants. But if we follow God's ways to the utmost in our home, or at school, work or when we go out, we are indeed doing very significant things. We are showing something of the kingdom. We may want to do something special on a mission field, not realising our school or workplace is a mission field. In the simple activities of our home we can be revealing something of the kingdom to our friends. Are you focussed enough to realise that? Are you willing to give your all, including what you do in the privacy of your home for the kingdom?

Thirdly, we should not hesitate to seek our own joy by following Jesus. John Piper has coined the phrase 'Christian hedonism'. What he means is that as we search and long for God, actually as we are found by him, we will find the greatest pleasure in life. God himself is the highest good in everything. That's why he calls us to worship him. When we do we find the greatest source of joy and contentment. The problem with us so often is not that we as human beings seek pleasure. It's that we look for it in the wrong places. The truth is that we find our greatest pleasure, our deepest and most enduring happiness, in a relationship with God. Our trouble usually is we seek pleasure in things that are not wrong in themselves, but which are poor substitutes for the real thing. We think attending a party, watching a movie, having a boyfriend, buying a new car, or going to a football game are things which will make us really happy. We are wrong. Oh, those things may bring a sense of pleasure to our lives. But that pleasure is only a shadow of the joy that the Lord offers us in himself. It is silly to be content with the happiness that is found in these other things and ignore what God offers to us. But, shouldn't we be concerned about what glorifies God rather than what is good for us? That is not a choice we have to make. God is glorified when we acknowledge that he is the source of true joy. And that apart from him we really have nothing. To say like the psalmist that "the Lord has made us glad" is to indeed bring honour to God's name. How honoured do you feel when someone gushes honestly 'It is so good to see you! It brings joy to my heart.'

C. S. Lewis put it like this, 'It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink, sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he can't imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.' Now that makes you think doesn't it? To think the limited pleasures we find in this life can even begin to compare with the eternal joy God offers us in Christ, is to show our ignorance. We haven't really grasped the wonder of the treasure. We see this truth clearly illustrated in these two parables. Jesus implied if the man would have chosen to just let the treasure sit in the field, because he didn't want to part with the stuff he already had, he obviously had no idea of its enormous value. If the merchant would have decided not to purchase the magnificent pearl because he thought the asking price was too high, he would have lost a massive opportunity. If we choose to ignore God because we think we are going to find a better life by doing things our way, we really have not understood what God is offering us. If we want to find true, rich and full joy in life, we need to trust and obey Jesus. We should reach for the greatest pleasure of all. Emily has understood the value of the treasure. Her public acknowledgment of Jesus as her Lord demonstrates that.

Two men who made this discovery were Eric Liddell and Jim Elliot. Eric Liddell was known as the 'Flying Scotsman.' In the 1924 Paris Olympics, he forfeited a chance to win a medal in the 200 metre race because he refused to compete on a Sunday. He ended up winning a gold medal and setting a world record in the 400 metre race instead. But the next year he gave up his promising athletic career and went to serve as a missionary in China. In 1945 he died there in a Japanese prison camp. He understood that in Jesus he had found an absolutely priceless pearl. And that it made complete sense that he let nothing stand in the way of following him. When Jim Elliot graduated at the top of his class from Wheaton College in 1949, he could have had a lucrative business career or could have probably enjoyed success in a variety of professions. Instead, he chose to be a missionary. He arrived in Ecuador in 1952 and four years later was killed, along with four of his companions, by the Auca Indians, the tribe they were trying to reach with the gospel. Many thought it foolish that such a talented young man would give up his life trying to help a primitive tribe. But Jim Elliot knew that was not the case. In Jesus he had found an absolutely priceless pearl. He was willing to give up everything he had, even his own life, in order to follow Jesus.

And he was glad to do so because, as he wrote in his journal, not long before he died, 'He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.'

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

*These questions can be followed up personally, with a Christian friend, in your small groups, or in discussion after the service. Reflection is important because too often we hear a good sermon and soon forget it without actually growing spiritually or changing in attitude or what we do. The reflection questions are meant to be challenging, because our spiritual growth and the salvation of others is so important.*

- Describe the 'greatest treasure'. Why is it so great? How would you explain it to a friend?
- Have you '*sold everything*' to buy the '**pearl of great price**'? Why or why not? Explain what Livingstone meant when he said '*Over the years I have given up many things, but I have never made a sacrifice.*'
- How focused are you in your Christian life? Are you aimed at the bullseye with all you are and have?
- Explain what Elliot meant when he said: "*He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*"