

# The Priceless Kingdom

Matthew 13:44-58

Man-centered evangelism makes people the object of God's worship rather than God the object of theirs. Thus the goal at many "seeker events" is to get a verbal affirmation, a card signed, or something that indicates a bare level of commitment to follow Jesus. But the kingdom of God is like hidden treasure and a priceless pearl that you must sell everything in order to buy. Christ has come and we must leave all to find and keep Him.

## Hidden Treasure

The man in the parable of hidden treasure doesn't appear to be looking for treasure. When he finds it hidden in the field, he conceals it and goes full of joy to sell everything he has in order to buy it (v. 44). Some commentators take issue that he doesn't tell the owner what's there. Of course, he has no obligation to do so, and whatever is hidden is right there in the field. But he wouldn't be the only character in Jesus' parables to do good things that make people uncomfortable. The unjust steward reduces the debts owed to his master so that he can quickly collect and also make friends for himself by unrighteous mammon (Lk. 16:9). Jesus is the greater Solomon teaching that wisdom—the wisdom that recognizes His kingdom for what it's worth—"is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her" (Prov. 4:15). In Proverbs, wisdom cries out in the streets and the town center inviting the simple to come and learn, but scoffers and fools want none of it (Prov. 1:20-33). This parable happens on the "land" which symbolically represents Israel just as the sea symbolizes the Gentiles. It's not just about the man who sees the value of treasure in the field but about the current owner who doesn't. He has no idea what's even there while the buyer is so full of joy he heads off to sell everything. As will become exemplified in the synagogue at the end of the chapter, Israel is becoming like the field owner, like Esau despising his covenant blessings. Jesus is a treasure hidden in plain sight, inviting everyone to follow Him, *for joy* to buy that field and become gazillionaires for eternity. Jesus offers Himself to us in the gospel, to be received by the power of the Holy Spirit. Joy is the longing and thirst for God and all of His goodness that can never be quenched (cf. 2 Cor. 6:10). Have you found this treasure, and do you still thirst for it with joy (Ps. 42:1)? God gives us His word, teeming with wisdom—not simplistic morality tales—to fill and shape us. He provides us with fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, children and leaders, friends and more all with the means to reveal His kingdom to us and cause us to grow in it.

## Sold Out

Unlike the man who finds the hidden treasure, the merchant actively seeks precious pearls (v. 45). He finds one of exceeding value and like the man with the treasure in the field, he loses all sense of proportion and sells everything he has to buy it (v. 46). Jesus already told His disciples not to worry about what they would eat or drink but seek first the kingdom and the Father would provide everything they need (Matt. 6:31-34). When Matthew heard "Follow Me", he walked out of the tax office and followed Jesus (Matt. 9:9). But lest we put the disciples in one category and ourselves in another, Jesus teaches the radical urgency of leaving everything to follow Him. *This is what the kingdom is like*. This does not usually mean people should empty out their bank accounts upon baptism, but He does always require us to steward everything we have for His purposes. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector and gladly gave half of his goods to the poor and made fourfold restitution: "And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost'" (Lk. 19:9-10). If

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you've made your money ripping people off, or if you've just been unfaithful, selfish and dishonest, it would be a great joy to hear these words from Christ after giving. What this usually means is that Christians tithe, and giving a tenth of your income usually means a significantly different living standard, and probably retiring later. And this conversation can get very practical, unlike the extreme action in these parables. The treasure and the pearl are objectively more valuable, but it doesn't look that way. In the New Jerusalem, the pearls are even bigger: "The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass" (Rev. 21:21). In the same way that billionaires work hard to give their money away—to invest it helpfully—so Christians should use all the means at their disposal to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, to thrive within and spread His kingdom. Sermons on these parables often go focus on telling people to value Jesus more than material things. But the men here use their material things to possess a greater one. Of course we should love Jesus more than money, but maturity means using the money and all you have (time, talent, treasure) to serve Him. The master in the parable of the talents wants a return on what he invested and calls the servant who buries it in the ground wicked and slothful (Matt. 25:26). False teachers and compromised ministries play manipulative music and show sad pictures to get you to give something, enough to assuage the guilt they heaped. Jesus says that if you know what's in His field and the value of that pearl you will not be able to stop from getting it for the joy that overwhelms your heart and life (2 Cor. 9:6-11).

## A Full Dragnet

The parable of the dragnet is similar to the wheat and tares. All kinds are gathered from the sea, and once the net is full, at the end of the age, the angels will sort it out, gathering the good and burning the bad (vv. 47-50). The good news goes out and all sorts of people are swept up into it. Some people profess to be Christians for superficial reasons, and this is a good problem to have—the kingdom casts a wide net. It's possible that by "the end of the age" Jesus means the end of the Judaic aeon, the destruction of the temple in 70 AD and enormous slaughter that will fall upon the people in Jerusalem, what the author of Hebrews calls "a fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10:27). This parable applies to the final judgment, but Jesus is also talking about the present, what the kingdom of God was like when He was teaching. The disciples will take the net into all the nations and it will come back full (cf. Col. 1:23). No one is alone in their field or with their pearl.

## Honor at Home

Jesus checks to see if the disciples understand all these things, and they answer "Yes, Lord" (v. 51). The well-trained scribe brings out treasure from the new and old, the whole counsel of God from Revelation to Genesis. Those in the synagogue in His country are both astonished at His teaching *and offended* by it (vv. 54, 57). They know His parents, sister and four brothers, and therefore aren't impressed, so He does few miracles there (vv. 55-58). These people are the landowner, lacking the eyes to see and the joy to sell what they have and buy it. Let that not be true of you. See what is hidden in plain sight and for joy go get it.