



The Cost of Embracing the Mission: The Worth of the Kingdom

Behold Our God – Read the Bible for Life Series #45

Matthew 13:44-46

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We sang the song this morning, “Let Your Kingdom Come.” The Kingdom of God is going to be a major part of our theme today. We already prayed and sang, “God, let Your Kingdom come. Let Your will be done.” Now we’re going to hear about the Kingdom from the Lord Jesus.

There’s a TV show I’ve come to enjoy over the past several years that basically addresses how much the things found in attics and garages are worth for many people. You’ve probably seen it: Antiques Roadshow. While many people come to the Antiques Roadshow with things they know are valuable, others come with stuff that appears to have been sitting in their basements or up in their attics for a while. They’re really anxious to find out how the expert appraisers will value their objects. As a viewer, I’m always waiting for that final moment of the interchange where the appraiser says to the individual, “Do you have any idea what this is worth?” Of course the individual always says, “I have no idea. I got it years ago. Grandma handed it down to me. It was buried in a box in the garage,” or whatever. Then they find out what it’s worth. Sometimes it’s worth a little bit, but sometimes they’re surprised at how much it’s worth. Every once-in-a-while, someone comes in with a literal treasure from home but they have no idea how valuable it is.

I happened to see one of these episodes a few years ago when Ted from Tucson came in with an old blanket that had been hung over the chair in his living room for generations. He learned that day on the Antiques Roadshow that this blanket was a rare Navaho Indian Chief’s blanket. There were very few blankets of this era around anymore. In fact, the appraiser said, “I have never seen one in this condition.” When they got to the point when he asked what it was worth, the appraiser put a number of several hundred thousand dollars on this blanket. But he said, “Really, it’s priceless. This is a national treasure. If it was destroyed, you couldn’t replace it. We don’t know of any others like it that exist.”

I have a theory that the Antiques Roadshow and our current economic conditions have contributed to a rise in garage sales. It certainly has among my household as we like to go to garage sales. What would you do if you walked into a garage sale and you saw a blanket just like Ted from Tucson's blanket, only in even better condition—more exquisite? What would you do to get that blanket? Would you buy everything in the garage sale or even the entire garage if necessary to get your hands on that priceless treasure?

Jesus told two stories in the Gospel of Matthew to emphasize the precious, exquisite and surpassing value of God's Kingdom to those who heard Him and to us. We're going to look at those two parables. Turn to Matthew 13.

Let me pray for God to work through the preaching and hearing of His Word before we read it.

God, we do want You to work through the preaching and hearing of Your Word and we're pausing for a moment to speak to You because we know that it is something supernatural, divine and outside our power to make happen. God, we can read Your Word, think on it and study it, but unless Your Holy Spirit infuses it and does something powerful to impress on us the truth of Your Word so we see Jesus Christ, this would be a wasted exercise. God, I confess to You that my preparation is incomplete and inadequate. But God, I have confidence that Your Word is completely sufficient and adequate. You have promised that it will not return void and that it will accomplish the purpose You have set out to accomplish through it. God, we pray that Your Kingdom would come and Your will would be done in us today as we look at Matthew 13:44-46. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Hear God's Word. This is Jesus speaking. He says,

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. 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, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

This is God's Word.

We're looking at a portion of Matthew 13, but I want us to understand the larger context—Matthew 13 as a whole—before we get into this text in particular. Matthew 13 is the third of five discourses (or speaking sections) by Jesus in the Book of Matthew. Matthew, like the other Gospel writers, is trying to show that Jesus is the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament given His Jewish roots. We can look at the four Gospels and if we had

to say which Gospel is the most Jewish, it would be Matthew because he readily connects Jesus to Old Testament predictions and prophecies of the Messiah. He clearly connects Him with David as the ultimate Son of David and he shows how Jesus is the One promised to Abraham to bless all nations.

More than the other Gospel writers, Matthew shows Jesus as the new and greater Moses. There was no one greater in the Old Testament than the law-giver Moses. Just as Moses went up on Mount Sinai and came down with the Law, in the Sermon on the Mount Matthew portrays Jesus as going up on a hill, preaching and teaching on the Law, giving His authoritative commentary on it as the new Moses. As Moses gave us the first five books of the Bible—the Pentateuch—in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus has five discourses (extended times of speaking or sermons) and this is one of them.

Here in Matthew 13, Jesus tells us eight parables. Parables are not absolutely unique to Matthew’s Gospel but no one gives us more of Jesus’ parables than Matthew does. If you’ve read the Bible, many times over or at least a few times you’ve run across the literary device or type of speaking called a “parable” that Jesus used quite often in His teaching. A parable is an ordinary story—a scene from everyday life—that Jesus would use to teach a particular spiritual Kingdom truth. A parable was meant to arrest the hearer’s attention. It was a very common story but by the time you got to the end of the story, Jesus would be telling you something that would make you step back and ask, “Did He just say that? Did I just hear what I think I heard? Did Jesus say Samaritans are my neighbors? Is He suggesting that a son who obeys the rules can be every bit as lost as a son who squanders his father’s wealth in debauchery?”

When we read parables in the Bibles, we have to understand what type of literature we’re reading. Bible scholars give many rules on reading and interpreting parables. A word of advice I would give in understanding a parable is to look for the central truth. Put yourself in the place of those hearers whom Jesus was speaking to in the original setting and let the parable strike you in the way it was meant to strike them.

These two parables are part of a cluster of three that talk about the surpassing value of the Kingdom. The copy of God’s Word that I have here has bold headings that are not part of the original text—the Bible itself—but are something Bible editors have put in to help us understand where we are in the sections. Look at the beginning of chapter thirteen and skim down. Chapter 13 begins with the parable of the sower and then Jesus talks about the purpose of the parables. Then He tells several other Kingdom parables. In many of

them He says, “The Kingdom of Heaven is like this or that.” Or, “To enter the Kingdom of Heaven, you need to be like this or that.”

When the Bible uses the term the “Kingdom of Heaven” or “Kingdom of God” or “Kingdom of Christ,” it is talking about the same thing. Matthew probably says “Kingdom of Heaven” because as a Jew, He did not want to take the name of the Lord in vain. He doesn’t even speak God’s name. Rather than calling it the “Kingdom of God,” He calls it the “Kingdom of Heaven.” This is a crucial theme in Scripture that we need to understand, but sometimes getting our arms around it is a little bit like tackling a greased pig. You think you have it but then it is a little bit slippery and you’re not quite sure.

The Kingdom of God is an extraordinarily important theme in Scripture. In fact, you could say it is the organizing theme of Scripture. When He created the universe, God was creating a Kingdom where He will be worshipped, honored and adored, but sin broke into that Kingdom and has messed things up so that not everything honors or brings glory to God as it should. The ultimate goal throughout Scripture is that everything will bring honor and glory to God, and that this planet, world and universe will once again be the kind of Kingdom that God intended it to be.

In his very helpful book, God’s Picture, Vaughn Roberts defines the Kingdom of God as “God’s people living in God’s place under God’s rule.” If you follow that paradigm through Scripture, you’ll see it’s a very helpful and biblically organized structure. When we talk about the Kingdom of God, we talk about it in terms of territory or realm. But when the Bible talks about the Kingdom of God, it talks less about a territory (real estate) and more about the rule, reign, power, authority; more about the King and the allegiance of His subjects that ought to go with it.

In the story of Scripture, when we get to the New Testament, Jesus Christ arrives as the Messiah and Matthew clearly portrays Him as the fulfillment of everything that was predicted in the Old Testament. It’s very clear from Jesus’ first sermon and from the first words in the Book of Mark that the Kingdom has come in the Person of Jesus Christ. That was His message—the Gospel of the Kingdom.

When we get to the New Testament, the Kingdom of God has begun to break into history in a real way. Jesus arrives on the scene in the embodiment of God’s rule, reign, righteousness, peace, justice and mercy. The thing that makes the Kingdom of God a little bit slippery to get our arms around is that it has this “already, not yet” aspect (regality) to it. It’s already here because Jesus is here; it’s still here because Jesus is here even though He

has ascended to the right hand of the throne of God the Father. He is the King of the Kingdom of God, ruling for His Father. He sent His Holy Spirit to live in those who are His people—His subjects. The Kingdom is wherever God’s people are, yet we look around our world, turn on the evening news, pick up a newspaper, and realize it’s not here as God intends for it to be. It’s not here in the way it will be in all perfection when Jesus returns to make all things new and to eradicate anything that is rebelling against His Kingdom and is not glorifying His Father.

In the Gospels, we see that Jesus’ message was about the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. We learned as we studied the King on His Mission, calling us to follow Him, that Jesus proclaimed, *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand”* (Mark 1:15). How should one respond? *“Repent and believe in the gospel.”* Last week we talked about the prerequisite of the mission—that you must be born again. Jesus told Nicodemus that “to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, one must be born again, born from above, born of water and the Spirit.”

Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert give a helpful definition of God’s Kingdom. “It’s God’s redemptive reign in the Person of His Son, Jesus the Messiah, which has broken into the present evil age and is now visible in the church—God’s benevolent, joy-filled, happy reign over His redeemed people.” The Kingdom of God is God’s reign, His ruler-ship, over His redeemed people.

In Matthew 13, we’re looking at parables that give us insight into what the Kingdom is like and how one should respond to it. After telling us the purpose of parables in Matthew 13, we see the parable of the sower where we learn the only response to the Gospel that is authentic is one that bears fruit. Then we read the parable of the mustard seed where we learn that the Kingdom starts small, but it will come to be the greatest. In the parable of the leaven we learn that a little bit of the Kingdom goes a long way—it permeates and affects everything it touches. In the parable of the weeds, we learn that the sons of the Kingdom and the sons of the evil one grow up together in this age but in the age to come, there will be a great separation.

These preceding parables to the ones we’re going to look at in a moment all tell us things about the Kingdom. This is what the Kingdom of God is like—it’s great, all pervasive, a place for the righteous. Now we come to these two parables: the Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Parable of the Pearl of Great Value. These two parables tell us how one ought to respond to the message of the Kingdom.

How should we view the Kingdom? What worth should we assign to the Kingdom? That's what Jesus is teaching us in these two very brief parables. Let's take a look at them.

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

In New Testament times, homes were not very secure and there were no banks as we know them so it was rather common for people to bury valuables in an earthen jar or vessel in the ground some place. This is a story of a man who is digging in a field and runs across some buried treasure. Apparently he is a common laborer and is digging along when he runs across this jar with treasure in it. He doesn't know whose it is. Maybe the person who buried it has moved or has been captured in war. We don't know, but legally he could keep that treasure according to the law of the time.

He goes the extra mile to make absolutely sure he will secure it. Perhaps he is just a common laborer—a fairly poor guy—and he's concerned that his boss might say, "Hey, you were working for me today, so whatever you found belongs to me." (I hope you're not a boss like that to anyone else.)

He does what he needs to do to make sure he secures this treasure. Since he's probably a poor man, He goes out and sells everything he has in order to secure this treasure. He buys the whole field just to get it. It takes everything he has but he doesn't look back. He can't help himself. The text says, "for his joy, out of his joy, *in his joy*." He has seen treasure. He's gotten a glimpse of it and he will stop at nothing to make sure it is his.

This reminds me of what is said about Boaz in Ruth. "The man will take care of this today. He's going to get it done." This guy is going to secure the treasure today. It's that valuable to him. It's worth that much.

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price

This next parable is very similar in many ways but there are some differences. The man in this parable is definitely not poor. He is probably very well off—probably a merchant, a businessman; possibly a wholesaler of fine pearls. Pearls in the ancient world at this time would have been very valuable. There are records of them getting very, very high prices. Notice they are fine pearls—he's dealing at the high end of the market. As he's going around (as would have been his business) to buy inventory, he finds one pearl of

incredible valuable. It is literally very precious. He is so captivated by this one pearl, that just like the man who found the treasure hidden in the field, he goes out and sells all that he has to get this one item. He must have it!

Don't miss what's going on here for this pearl merchant. He has just made an incredibly bad business move by immediately creating a cash flow crisis. He spent it all and has no inventory to move in the meantime. He has only one piece of inventory. The only way that he's going to turn a profit is by selling the pearl of great value. But clearly, he has no intention of selling it. The pearl is not inventory nor is it an investment. It is an heirloom; a treasure—his source of joy, just like the man who found treasure in the field. The merchant has retired from pearl dealing and is now a fulltime pearl adorer.

Jesus says, "This is what the Kingdom is like. It is so precious and of such great worth that one should do whatever he or she can do to obtain it, enter into it and know the joy of being in the Kingdom." Jesus wants us to know above all things that the Kingdom is worth all—all that we possess, all our being, all that we have. The surpassing value of the Kingdom deserves our whole-hearted response. "All of me. All of who I am." The value of the Kingdom is so great that the response to it ought to be proportionately as great. All for all! We ought to pursue the Kingdom with a passion that is proportionate to its surpassing value. That's what the Kingdom of Jesus Christ is like.

I want to draw four truths or lessons from these parables.

1. Whether or not you are searching for the Kingdom, it has the power to overwhelm.

The man in the field was not looking for the treasure but when he came across it, everything in his life changed—what he pursued, his values, everything about him. Maybe it has been that way for you. You were not seeking Jesus Christ or any change in life. Your life was going along just fine so far as you knew it. Then God arrested your attention. Someone told you about Jesus Christ, that you had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and that Jesus is the provision for your sin. Now you look at this Jesus Who was just a name or a figure but now He is precious and valuable to you because He is the One Who bore your sin on the cross. Your life took a radical change of direction and you came to Him in repentance and faith.

Maybe you were more like the merchant who reminds me of a lot of people in our culture. He was searching for fine pearls. This is something we see in our day and age—people who are on some kind of quest for some ultimate truth. They draw some truths

from this religion, a little bit of truth from human philosophy or talk shows and string those pearls together and say, “This is my life philosophy. It’s all good and all truth. All of the rivers kind of flow into one.” And yet at the end of the day, they say, “But I still haven’t found what I’m looking for.” There’s some kind of search going on.

For that person, God arrests his or her attention with the Person of Jesus Christ. He says, “Whatever truth you drew from over here and over there, Jesus is far greater—He’s far more valuable. If there was any truth in that, it came from Him anyway.” Seeing Jesus clarifies that much of the former philosophy was probably not true.

These parables remind me that there are those types of people in our world and many others who need to hear the message of the Kingdom—the gospel of the Kingdom. We need to be aware of people in our lives who have no interest in Jesus and aren’t looking for Him; of people who are on some kind of quest for truth or ultimate meaning. We need to be ready to point both kinds of people to Jesus.

Next month, Exploring Christianity will begin again as we did in the spring. This is an opportunity to invite both kinds of people, but this is especially an opportunity to invite people like the pearl merchant who are open to listening to truth and discussing the ideas of the world. We will bring them to this place for a dinner and in a very warm way, present the Gospel, come alongside and discuss Who Jesus is and what makes Him unique and different from the other gods and religions of this world. Look for more information on Exploring Christianity and start praying about who you can invite and how you might serve.

2. The overwhelming response to the Kingdom is joy.

The second lesson I want to draw our attention to is that the overwhelming response to the Kingdom is joy. The Gospel has the power to overwhelm us and the overwhelming response is joy. When the man found the treasure in the field, in his joy he went and sold everything. I think joy is also clearly implied for the man who found the pearl of greatest price because he also went and sold everything. His life dramatically changed. It says if he even had a mantel left, he wanted to put that pearl up on it and adore and enjoy it for as long as he possibly could.

Both were pursuing their treasures out of joy. For both, what they gave up was not even in the realm of sacrifice. If you asked them, they’d say, “I have sacrificed nothing to obtain the treasure. It was a great deal! It was the best bargain ever!”

We say that when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, don’t we?

All I once thought gain I have counted loss
Spent and worthless now, compared to this
Knowing you, Jesus
Knowing you, there is no greater thing
You're my all, you're the best
You're my joy, my righteousness
And I love you, Lord

(All I Once Held Dear by Graham Kendrick)

That's what the Apostle Paul said. He had a lot going for him. He was at the top of his game, was a rising star in the Jewish religion; he had power and support. But having his attention arrested by the risen Jesus Christ, having turned from his sin and having placed his faith in Christ, he looks back and says in Philippians 3:8-9,

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

That's the great gift of the King—this righteousness that is outside of ourselves. It's a righteousness that we remember as we take the bread and cup in a few moments. There is a righteousness that we don't have but need. A righteousness Jesus secured for us at the cross. It brings us great joy to be part of this Kingdom and to know what it means to be clothed with His righteousness and have our sins forgiven. It brings great joy!

A great test for us is to say, "Have I entered into this Kingdom? Have I been born again? Have I trusted in Jesus?" Ask yourself, "Do I have great joy? Is there a deep and abiding joy in my life?" Don't ask, "Do I ever get sad, bummed out or disappointed? Have I ever gone through a season of being down or despondent?" But I'm asking down deep, at the root, is there a deep and abiding joy that can withstand the waves of circumstances in life and is it a joy found in King Jesus, in His reign, His ruler-ship in your life? The overwhelming response to His Kingdom is joy.

3. In order to know the joy of Christ's Kingdom, you need to seek to enter that Kingdom.

Thirdly, we need to seek to enter this Kingdom. We need to understand this Kingdom and entrance into it is not something that can be purchased. That's where the analogy of the parable breaks down and we don't want to push it in that direction because

that would clearly contradict all of Scripture. Listen to what Pastor Daniel Doriani (Central Presbyterian Church, Clayton, MO) says when commenting on this passage and the treasure of the Gospel.

“The glory and the treasure of the Gospel is just this: we do not do a thing to lay hold of it. Jesus does all that is necessary. We receive His rule and His blessing by grace alone through faith alone. The supreme treasure of the Kingdom is the Gospel of the Kingdom.”

We learned last week that we enter the Kingdom by being born again. Jesus invites all who will listen to His voice to come out of the darkness and into the light of Christ, just as He did with Nicodemus. He invites us to repent of our sin, believe in Jesus for salvation, stop storing up treasure here on earth where moth and rust will destroy and start laying up treasure in Heaven where all of God’s children have an inheritance that is kept securely. My urgent plea to you is if you have not entered the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ through repentance and faith, enter that Kingdom. Come to Him today!

I love how specific both of these parables are. He goes and sells all that he has and he buys that field. The man sold everything and bought the pearl. He entered through the narrow gate.

4. The surpassing value of the Kingdom ought to be reflected in every aspect of our lives.

Finally if we are Kingdom people, if we have entered into the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ through repentance and faith and in effect have said, “This is more valuable to me than anything else,” then every aspect of our lives ought to reflect that. Here we have an application challenge, don’t we? This is one of those passages where the application is basically everything and that can be a bit daunting, can’t it? When I say to you, “The supremacy of Jesus Christ ought to be reflected in every aspect of your life,” if you’re like me, you’ll start listing all the places where the supremacy of Jesus Christ is not what it ought to be and you can quickly become defeated. Ask yourself, “What area of my life do I think least reflects the values of the Kingdom, the authority and reign of Jesus Christ?”

As I studied this passage, there were areas that I became convicted about as maybe you have as we’ve studied it here, namely that the surpassing value of the Kingdom be reflected in my use of time. How am I using my time? Am I using it to glorify God or am I wasting time? Am I so busy that I don’t have time to reflect on the supremacy of Jesus Christ? Is it reflected in my use of money—not only what I am willing to give for the cause of the Kingdom but what am I doing with the part I keep? Is it being used to glorify God?

What about the mission of my family in my household? What are we about as a family? What are we living for? What are our goals and objectives? Is the surpassing value of Jesus Christ reflected in your family?

If you're single, how is the surpassing value of Jesus Christ reflected in your household? You have a Christian household as well whether or not you live with family, a roommate or on your own. God has given you a sphere of influence to display His glory.

Is the surpassing value of the Kingdom reflected in our mission as a church and in whatever part you and I have in that mission? Do we display Jesus Christ as valuable above all things? God's Word has the power to convict us and at the same time has the power to comfort us. We should take heart from the parable of the mustard seed just a few verses before, where it teaches that the Kingdom's effect on one's life may start small but as we seek Christ's Kingdom first, His righteousness and priorities will take root and grow, dominate and define our lives to God's glory.

Christ's Kingdom is like a treasure buried in a field. It's like a pearl of great price—something that people pursue with great abandon when they get a taste of how wonderful it is, of the surpassing value of it. And it brings us overwhelming joy.

As we are coming to the communion table this morning, let's reflect on the overwhelming joy of the King. What brought Him joy and continues to bring Him joy? The writer to the Hebrews says, Jesus is *"the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."* He is in the position of the highly exalted King, but what we remember at the Lord's Table is something Jesus did out of joy: the King went to the cross out of joy and bore the sin of the world out of joy. His body that we remember in the broken bread was torn in two as the curtain was torn apart in the temple giving people access to God, Whom they had been alienated from. As we take the cup, we remember that as Jesus' blood flowed, it had the power to wash clean our deepest, darkest stains and He did all this for the joy that was set before Him.

If you are one who has entered into the Kingdom and Jesus is your greatest treasure and joy, then take joy as we celebrate communion together, in community with one another through the Holy Spirit, all of us in communion with Jesus Christ. But if you have not entered into the Kingdom, rather than coming to this table, come to Jesus that He might be Your King, that you might know the forgiveness of sins and the effectiveness of what we celebrate here of what Jesus has done on the cross.

Take a moment to bow your head and reflect on all that Christ has done for you through the cross. Remember that again every day.

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