

Week 21
February 8, 2009

Everything
The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl
Matthew 13:44-46

Perhaps this is two parables. But the message of both is clear – *everything*.

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure. When a man finds it, he sells all he has and buys the field.

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant who finds a priceless pearl. He sells everything to buy that pearl.

The first simile makes the treasure central – the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure. The second makes the person central – the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant. But the message stays the same.

The treasure is priceless; worth selling all to possess it. The merchant finds a priceless pearl; worth selling all to possess it.

What are the contents of the treasure chest? The blessings and benefits that fill the box can be described in many ways, but I'll list some of them using two scripture passages – *Romans 5* and *Ephesians 1*.

1. Justification by faith
2. Peace with God through Christ
3. Access to grace
4. Rejoicing
5. Hope
6. Purpose in suffering
7. God's love poured out
8. The Holy Spirit given to us
9. Christ's death for us.
10. Saved from God's wrath
11. Reconciled to God
12. Life
13. New righteousness
14. Blessed in the heavenly realms
15. Chosen by God
16. Adopted as children
17. Redemption through Christ's blood
18. Forgiveness of sins
19. Grace lavished on us
20. Wisdom
21. Understanding
22. Mysteries revealed
23. Unity with earth and heaven

24. Our purpose – for his glory
25. Included in Christ
26. Marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit
27. Guaranteed inheritance
28. A hopeful calling
29. His great power at work in us.
30. A place in his church – the body and fullness of him.

And the list goes on. A treasure chest of blessings and benefits are available when we discover the kingdom of heaven.

And what is the essence of the priceless pearl? I suppose we could simply say, “Jesus.” Or God’s love, or salvation, or everlasting life. Or all of the above.

Why sell everything?

First, the treasure is worth it. If we really believe that Jesus is true and truly believe that the kingdom is real, then all of our earthly goods and attachments pale in comparison. If Jesus is God’s son, unveiling God’s nature and revealing a pathway to live forever in a place of indescribable beauty and glory, then there is nothing in my pockets, my car, my bank, my house, my date book – nothing that compares to this treasure. This treasure is worth *everything*. In *Matthew 16:26*, Jesus asks a critical question: “What good does it do us to gain the whole world, yet forfeit our souls?”

Second, partial payments apparently aren’t enough. Jesus says in *Matthew 16:24-25* that he’s asking us to lay down our lives – to find our lives in losing them. In *Matthew 10:37ff*, Jesus challenges his followers to make him their (our) first love, and to take up crosses and lay down lives. *Romans 12* uses this language: “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice.” Nothing in scripture invites lukewarm love, moderate devotion or partial offerings. Jesus asks for everything.

Before we get too alarmed, we should remember that all of this means freedom for us. The things that we own and grasp and grip and guard are the very things that eventually own us. This subtle slavery is our undoing, and Jesus came to rescue us from our possessions and our misguided obsessions. “It is for freedom Christ set us free,” chides Paul (*Galatians 5:1*). “Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” While Paul is specifically speaking of the yoke of legalism, the exhortation transfers easily to anything that threatens to entangle us and trap us.

Jesus meets a rich young man in *Matthew 19* who understands the value of God but can’t release himself from the grip of his possessions. Jesus warns us that the more we have, the harder it is to relinquish and love God wholly. Wealth threatens to divide our loyalties and weaken our devotion. In *1 Timothy 6*, Paul commands the rich not to be arrogant and warns them against the folly of putting hope in wealth. Be free, give generously, do good, lay up treasure in heaven.

Jesus invites us to view the whole matter of possessions in a new light – our whole lives, even. We are caretakers and stewards of the matter and matters around us. We don’t own anything, not even our bodies. All of our goods and potentials and every day are a gift and a trust. We are keepers of the trust. We relinquish our need to own and

control and embrace the call to manage and steward. We are invested, but we're not ultimately in charge. We're responsible to, but not completely for. We're busy and careful and attentive, but not overly burdened or overwhelmed, because it's not my money, not my house, not my car – *not my life*. My *children* have even been offered to God, and I am a steward and caretaker, not an owner or controller. What does he want for them? That is the question that should guide my investments and habits in parenting.

And all of this comes with the peace of knowing that we are heirs to God's kingdom; beneficiaries of eternal life, security, happiness and purpose. Yes, we grieve losses whenever natural affections have aided us in our stewardship. But we don't grieve the way the world grieves. Yes, we are concerned for loved ones whenever those within our realm of care are suffering, but we entrust them to God and do our part in representing his love.

We are in this world, but not of it. We love all people, but are less attached to our lives every day that we're in Christ. We learn what it means to take up our crosses; to die to ourselves; to lay down our lives; to present ourselves as living sacrifices.

And it becomes our joy.

In a passage by C.S. Lewis ...

"The Christian way is different: harder, and easier. Christ says, "Give me All. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked – the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own shall become yours."