

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
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18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
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Matthew 13:44-46 “The Pearl of Great Price”

Intro. Have you ever found buried treasure? I suppose you have at least *hoped* that you would find some. One of my best childhood memories was the time when some organization dumped a truckload of sand in a vacant lot, spread it out, and buried quarters and even some silver dollars for kids in the neighborhood to find. It was so exciting to find buried treasure. Well in this text of Scripture Jesus tells a story about a man whose hopes and dreams came true. One day this man was probably working for someone in a field. Perhaps he was plowing; perhaps he was digging a well, or digging a foundation for a house. Then, he noticed that he had hit something unusual. He discovered that he had uncovered buried treasure! Perhaps he found a chest of jewelry, or gold and silver coins.

Burying one’s valuables was very common until modern times. This protected your assets from thieves, from fire, and from the ravages of war. My great-great grandfather Stephen Felker was a wealthy man before the Civil War. During the war, he managed to preserve some of his wealth by burying gold coins in a gourd under a muscadine vine at his farm.¹ When most other people in Georgia had worthless confederate notes, he had hard currency and increased his wealth as a private banker.

So what we read about in the parable was not unusual. Yet the man in the parable had a problem. Being an honest man, he did not just take the treasure. Perhaps it belonged to the owner of the field. So to find out, he sold all that he had to have enough to make an offer to buy the field. If the treasure belonged to the owner, he would either not sell it, or he would remove the treasure first. The fact that neither occurred proved that the treasure belonged to someone else. Probably the original owner of the treasure had died, and no one knew about the treasure. Besides, Jewish rabbinic law said that “if a man finds scattered fruit, scattered money ... these belong to the finder.”² So evidently the man sold all that he had to obtain a treasure far more valuable. This would insure his legal right to the treasure. Besides, there could have been more treasure buried in that field.

Then Jesus told another story that had a similar main point. There was a merchant man who bought pearls wholesale, and then sold them as a retailer. Pearls were found in the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean. In that day they were difficult to obtain,³ rare, and very costly. Pearls were the equivalent of what diamonds are today. They were the most valuable gem in the world at that time. If you owned pearls, you owned a fortune. Such a fortune could be concealed in a small bag, and easily hidden. Pearls were coveted by wealthy women, partly as a sign of great wealth. They would even adorn their hair with pearls (1 Tim. 2:9). By the way, the Greek word for “pearl” is *margarites*, from which we get the name Margaret. My mother was called Margaret.

¹ Letter written by Joseph Harben Felker to a Mrs. Tyler, dated 11/2/1932. The original letter was in the possession of Carolyn Alley Peterson.

² William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958), 94-95.

³ A pearl diver would tie rocks to his body, jump over the side of a little boat, go down into dangerous waters infested with sharks and other creatures, and scour the mud below for oysters. A pearl diver had to hold his breath during the whole dive, and hope that he wouldn’t drown [MacArthur].

Well this man was on a buying trip, “seeking beautiful pearls.” And then from a certain wholesaler he “found one pearl of great price.” It was bigger and more beautiful than anything he had ever seen. When he saw it, his heart and mind must have immediately exclaimed, “This is it!” Knowing its great value, he “went and sold all that he had and bought it.” There was never any hesitancy.

Now in both stories the men sold all that they had to obtain something of great value. Now in some way these stories illustrate some important spiritual truths relating to the kingdom of God. Notice that both parables begin with the words, “the kingdom of heaven is like....” So what can we learn about the kingdom of God through these parables? Well, the first principle I see about God’s Kingdom is this:

I. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS PRICELESS

Jesus said in v.44, “the kingdom of heaven is like treasure....” Just as the buried treasure was of great value, and the beautiful pearl was of great value, even so the Kingdom of God is of great value, yea, priceless. Christ and His Kingdom are a treasure beyond comparison. His Kingdom is incorruptible, undefiled, and eternal. When you enter His kingdom, you can begin to obtain the blessings of the kingdom, starting with salvation and the forgiveness of sin. The blood of Christ washes out sin’s darkest stains. The grace of God purifies the foulest heart. You also obtain the blessings of love, joy, goodness, glory, heaven, and eternal life. When you have entered the kingdom of God, you can experience peace in life’s roughest storms. You can have hope to cheer you in the darkest hour. You can have courage that defies death and the grave. You will know Christ, who alone can satisfy the deepest longings of your soul. Indeed, these spiritual riches make the poorest rich, and without which the richest are poor indeed. The eternal value of salvation outstrips the value of all the fine pearls in the world.

Now the value of the kingdom is found in the King. Jesus Christ is rich beyond measure. He created everything, and He owns everything. Someday He is coming back to claim the throne of David, and to claim this world back to Himself. And the amazing thing is the fact the Romans 8:17 says that we are “joint heirs with Christ.” All that He has, we have. His life becomes our life. His righteousness is ours as well. He is building a beautiful dwelling place for us in heaven, and it will be ours to enjoy forever.

Yes, Christ is like the one pearl of great price. All others fade in value compared to Him. One sun is better than a million stars when it comes to scattering our darkness, and giving warmth to the earth. Even so Christ is better than all the things of this world. The riches of this world can be lost in a moment, by death or by disaster. But the riches of Christ abide forever.

If you have not yet entered into the kingdom of God, I hope that today you will discover the surpassing value of doing so. And Christian, how often do you think of the riches that you have in Christ. Do you fully appreciate those riches? When was the last time you thanked God for what you have in Christ?

The second main truth that I want to share with you is this:

II. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS PERCEIVED BY FAITH

I tread carefully on this point of interpretation. We must be careful about interpreting each *detail* of a parable. They may be incidental to the story, and not intended to illustrate a

spiritual truth. But since in both stories the men did not see their treasure at first, I believe we can draw a lesson that is certainly found elsewhere in Scripture.

The treasure in v.44 was hidden; it wasn't lying on the surface of the ground. Perhaps the man had passed over it many times, totally unaware of the riches that were below his feet. Others had done the same. Also, the merchant had to search for the one fine pearl he had never seen before.

In the same way, the value of salvation is not readily apparent to unbelievers. The riches of the kingdom of God are largely perceived only by faith in God's Word. 1 Cor. 2:14 says, "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Likewise, Psa. 118:22 says, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone." Though their Messiah was in their midst, the builders or leaders of Israel rejected Him (21:42). They didn't recognize Him for the treasure He was. Some people never bother to look beyond the surface of things. They are so busy fooling around looking at the present, superficial things of life that they never look for the hidden treasure of God. In fact, they are blind to such things. 2 Cor. 4:4 says, "whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them." Nonbelievers do not understand the inestimable value of salvation.⁴ That is why the Lord said in Matthew 7:14, "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." Too many people do not enter God's Kingdom, or have no interest in it, because Christ and His kingdom are like buried treasure that they just don't see. They only see what the world has to offer. It seems so attractive. Many find out too late that the things of this world do not have any lasting value.

A geologist was working in mountains of South America. He went to a village and in one of the simple homes, he noticed the door was propped open with a large rock. Upon closer examination he realized there was something special about the rock. He asked if he could trade a different rock to serve as the door prop. The woman of the home agreed. He took it with him, and discovered that the rock contained a large diamond! After cutting, it was a 546-carat diamond, one of the largest in the world. Just think. The woman had untold wealth, and didn't realize her riches.

Argumentation:

So I suggest to you to look beyond what is easily seen by faith. 2 Cor. 4:18 says, "while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Search for the true, lasting riches. And that leads to my next point:

III. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS DISCOVERED IN DIFFERENT WAYS

There is one big difference between the two parables: In the parable of the treasure, the man made his find by accident. In the parable of the pearl, the man was searching for pearls when he found one of great value. Even so, people find the kingdom of God in different ways. On the one hand:

A. Many Discover the Kingdom of God Without Seeking It – The man in the field was not searching for buried treasure. He just happened upon it (v.44a).

⁴ That is why Jesus said in Mt. 7:6, "Do not ... cast your pearls before swine...."

Even so, the Apostle Paul was not seeking to enter the Kingdom—he thought he was already in it. He was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians when Christ spoke from heaven and redeemed him (Ac. 9:1-6). A thirsty Samaritan woman who went to a well was only seeking water. But she happened to meet Jesus, heard His word, and went home redeemed (Jn. 4:7-29, 42). There are some people who go to church to mock the preacher, but then after hearing the gospel, they get saved. Folks, even though most are not seeking God (Rom. 3:11b), Jesus is always seeking to save souls. He said in Luke 19:10, “for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” God is sovereign, and He can line up the circumstances of your life to bring you to Christ even when you’re not seeking Him.

There are men and women listening to me now who did not plan to be confronted with this message to their souls. If there is one such, to whom I am speaking, who has never thought that God was his only Good, who has been swallowed up in worldly things and the common affairs of life, and who now feels as if a sudden flash has laid bare the hidden wealth in the Gospel, I beg such a one not to turn away from the newly discovered treasure, but to make it his own.

B. Others Find God’s Kingdom after a Diligent Search - Such a person is illustrated by the merchant seeking the pearl of great price (v.45). Indeed, there are some whose hearts God has touched well before their encounter with Him. This causes them to seek for the truth. They seek for the true God, and the true way of salvation, and for the true riches. They do not want to live a common, low life, but a noble, good life. And such a person may be here today, or watching or listening today, seeking the true riches.

The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-38), the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10:1-8, 30-33), and the Berean Jews (Acts 17:10-12) are all examples of people who searched after God, and found Him.

If you are not yet in the Kingdom of God, I suggest that you search for it until you find it. Diligently search after God. He said in Jer. 29:13, “And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.” One of the best ways to seek after God is to search the Scriptures. Jesus said in John 5:39, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.” Yes, Christ is the One you are looking for! And keep attending a church where the Word of God is preached, and taught, and where Christ is proclaimed.

Finally, there is one other truth that is the main truth of these parables:

IV. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS PERSONALLY APPROPRIATED

Each man finds something that he personally appropriates, or gains possession of. And the big similarity is how each man obtains what they found of surpassing value. There are two ways of finding; there is only one way of getting. In both cases they sold all that they had and bought it.

Does this illustrate how we obtain entrance into the kingdom of God? We cannot press the details of the story too much. In the story, obtaining the prize through purchase was the only legitimate way. But we know from other Scriptures that you cannot buy or work your way into the kingdom of God. Ephesians 2:9 says that salvation is “not of works, lest any man should boast.” Even the Old Testament taught salvation by grace. Isa. 55:1 says, “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” So the story does *not* illustrate obtaining

salvation with a literal purchase, but it does illustrate the importance of recognizing the surpassing value of God's kingdom, and doing whatever is necessary to obtain the privilege, even if it means great sacrifice on your part.

What would you be willing to do to receive the forgiveness of sin? What would you do to obtain an abundant life full of love, joy, and peace? What would you do to become a joint-heir of Jesus? What would you be willing to do to obtain eternal life in a beautiful place called heaven? Wouldn't you be like the men in the parables, and make whatever sacrifice is necessary that you may obtain something of such value?

Well I have good news for you. These riches are gifts of a loving God. Romans 6:23 says, "...the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." But even though salvation and eternal life are gifts of God, I do believe that there is a requirement for salvation that is illustrated by the parables, and taught elsewhere very clearly in the Scriptures. You appropriate the riches of the kingdom only if you are willing to deny self and sin. Jesus said in Matthew 10:38-39, "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it." Do you want to "find" the surpassing value of eternal life in the Kingdom of God? Then you must lose your own life. You must give up all claim to run your life as you wish. You must be willing to abandon everything you have to affirm that Christ is the Lord of your life. A person must exchange his sin and self-will for Christ's leadership. After all, keep in mind that we are talking about the *kingdom* of God. In order to have a kingdom, you must have a king, and you must have members of the kingdom who obey the king. And who is the King that makes these enormous claims upon all mankind? It is Jesus. He is the rightful King who can demand complete surrender and loyalty. And His right to the throne has been proven! Romans 1:4 says that He was "declared to be the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection from the dead." He is the King of power. And He is the king of love, for He loved you so much that He suffered incredibly on the cross to save you from your sin, and to make the blessings of the Kingdom available to you.

I think that when most people present the gospel, they don't stress the cost of following Christ enough. Jesus said in Luke 14:28, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it." Even so, before a person becomes a Christian, he should count the cost. You must repent of sin, and turn away from it. Are you willing to do that? Following Christ can cost you some friends. We must not cheapen the Gospel. I'm afraid that too many people have tried to bypass repentance. They think they don't have to give up anything to obtain Jesus.

Mickey Cohen was a big-time gangster back in the 40s and the 50s. He was even called the "king of Los Angeles." One of his gang members went to a Billy Graham Crusade in Los Angeles and received Christ as his Lord and Savior. Well, it so impressed this gangster that he began to investigate Christianity. He met a man by the name of Bill Jones, who was a leading Christian layman there in Los Angeles, and Bill Jones began to witness to Mickey Cohen and even led him to pray a sinner's prayer. Now at the time Jones was convinced that his decision was real. But he realized that he needed badly some deeper instruction about the Christian life. So he arranged for Cohen to fly to New York City to meet with Billy Graham. It turned out that Cohen really only wanted the publicity of meeting with Graham; tried to have his picture made with him backstage, but Graham wisely refused. He did go to the crusade and listened to Dr. Graham preach on hell and repentance and salvation. He came under deep conviction, but even though reporters were there wanting to know if he would make his *public* profession of faith, he refused to do so.

He returned to Los Angeles and started hanging around again with his underworld cronies. This very much upset Bill Jones, who sought him out and said, “Mickey, as a new Christian you ought to be putting as much mileage between yourself and the mob as you possibly can.” Cohen replied, “Jones, you never told me that I would have to give up my gangster career; that I would have to give up my friends. You have Christian movie stars, Christian athletes, Christian businessmen, so what’s the matter with being a Christian gangster? If I have to give all that up—if that’s Christianity—count me out.”⁵

Folks, if you are going to come to God you must deny self and sin, take up your cross, and follow Jesus. If you are going to obtain the surpassing riches of God, you must either count out your sin, or God will count you out.

Oh, but there are others who have counted the cost, and decided that the surpassing value of the riches of Christ are worth any sacrifice. A Chinese boy in Singapore found Christ as his Savior and arranged to be baptized shortly after his graduation. But to his surprise he won a scholarship of \$500 a year for four years in the Hong Kong University. One of the conditions was, “The winner must be a Confucianist.” To a poor student the temptation to defer baptism was great, but he resisted and presented himself for baptism at the appointed time. A friend, a Confucianist, stood next in line for the scholarship, but was so impressed that he also refused it, saying, “If Christianity is worth so much to my classmate, it can be worth no less to me. I will be a Christian.” He also received Christ and was baptized.⁶

Folks, when you think about it, what Christ requires is not a bad transaction at all. You give up all you have for all He has. And the main point of the parables is the fact that obtaining the riches of Christ is worth any sacrifice you may make. The blessedness of the Kingdom is so valuable that a person would have to be a fool not to be willing to sell everything he has, so to speak, to gain it. Surely it is reasonable to fling away fake pearls for real ones. Surely, in all regions of life, we willingly sacrifice the second best in order to get the very best. Surely, you have the best bargain, if you part with the world and yourselves and get Christ. The apostle Paul said in Php. 3:8, “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”

But the real fool is the man who, when he has seen the treasure, flings another shovelful of earth upon it, and goes away and makes no sacrifice to obtain it, nor think anything more about it. That is like the person who hears this sermon, and goes away, and forgets about the surpassing treasure that I have proclaimed. Please seek the treasure, the spiritual riches that God has for you. Don’t let anything keep you from obtaining it. Nothing else is worth it.

Argumentation: C.S. Lewis once said, “The only thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important.” If it’s really true, then it deserves everything you’ve got. It’s either all, or nothing. A lot of people try to give God just part of their life. It’s like I have this pie – I have my social life, and I have my career life, and I have my recreational life, you know I have my family life and over here my retirement life and over here I have my spiritual life—as if your spiritual life is just one part of the pie. Wrong. Christ wants the whole pie to be under His control. You can’t say, “You know God, I’ll give you 10% of my life.” He wants it all. He wants your whole being.

⁵ From a sermon by Dr. James Merritt on Gen. 35; www.sermonsearch.com.

⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, *Conquering the Fear of Death: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians 15* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 512-513.

Conclusion: Will you give God your all today? Will you turn from sin and self to obtain the surpassing value of God's treasure? He will give you eternal life, an abundant life of love, joy, and peace. He will give you a purpose in life. Don't turn away from these riches, and cling to the worthless, fake pearls of this world. Come to Christ today. Repent of your sin. Trust in Him. Give your all to Christ today!

Sources: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); John MacArthur, Jr., *The Parables of the Kingdom: Study Notes on Matthew 13:1-52* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1984); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, reprint, Christian Publishing Co.; Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

Oliver B. Greene, J. Vernon McGee, John Philips and Wiersbe interpret this parable allegorically. They see the treasure in the field as Israel, and the pearl as the church, and Christ obtaining both through *His* sacrifice. Because they follow a very different interpretation, they were not used.

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