

The Kingdom of Heaven is Like ...Treasure

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Have you ever had the good fortune of finding something valuable and being able to claim it for yourself? Years ago, when I was in Bible College, I came across \$40 in the school library. At that time, as a strapped student, that was a whole lot of money! I turned it in to the Head Librarian, but a week later, since no one had claimed it, it was given back to me! I have to admit, I opted to use it rather unwisely ... making a trip to DQ for some ice cream with friends! A couple of years back, when at a Canucks Game I went to one of the ATM machines and found \$60 sitting in the dispenser. There was really no one to turn the money in to, so I accepted it as an unanticipated gift from God! Finding treasure is always an enjoyable experience! And, certainly something to celebrate!

Well, in our Scripture passage today Jesus shares two parables about individuals who found treasure that far surpassed any other treasures they had come across in their lives. Their stories are told in Matthew 13:44-46. I want to share The Message translation with you now:

God's kingdom is like a treasure hidden in a field for years and then accidentally found by a trespasser. The finder is ecstatic – what a find! – and proceeds to sell everything he owns to raise money and buy that field. Or, God's kingdom is like a jewel merchant on the hunt for excellent pearls. Finding one that is flawless, he immediately sells everything and buys it.

Jesus told many parables about the Kingdom of Heaven. Through them we learn that the Kingdom of Heaven is available to us in the here and now. It is, in essence, the knowledge of God's abiding presence and the ability to know and choose His good and perfect will each and every day. In Christ's coming, the Kingdom of Heaven came to earth! And we reap its benefits today, tomorrow and through eternity.

The parable of the treasure in the field and the parable of the pearl serve to affirm the immeasurable value and superlative worth of the Kingdom of Heaven. In both cases, the Kingdom's value is viewed as so great and so unique that the finders are willing to sell everything to claim their prize! The latter point is stressed most in the parable of the pearl. The pearl merchant found many pearls in his search for "excellent" ones. Those many pearls symbolized the different spiritual and religious paths existing in his day. But the one he ultimately purchased in the parable was the Kingdom of Heaven, and it was selected and

purchased because it was “flawless” (The Message) and of “great value” (NIV).

The pearl of the Kingdom of Heaven outshone all the others. Its purity and truth stood out! The same could not be said of the other pearls that he discovered along the way. For that reason, the merchant was willing to sell everything he had and secure the flawless pearl! In the same way, the treasure-finder willingly sold everything he had in order to secure the treasure. Why? Because he realized that it was worth that much and more! In this, these two coupled parables are the same.

The one thing that is decidedly different in these two parables is the method of discovery, and that is something we need to pay attention to. In the first case, the Kingdom (described as treasure hidden in a field) is found quite by accident. The finder wasn't specifically looking for it, but there it was. Rules of that day placed the ownership of any treasure found underground in the hands of the land's owner. So, the treasure-finder in this parable immediately and intentionally leaves the treasure in the ground, sells all that he has, and purchases the land so that he can become the treasure's rightful owner. The value of the treasure he inadvertently found made the purchase of the land well worth it!

In the second parable, the Kingdom (described as a flawless pearl) was discovered through determined effort. The finder (a pearl merchant) was

specifically looking for a perfect pearl, and he diligently pursued his search believing he would find it! And find it he did! His persistence paid off!

These parables lead us to two specific questions:

1. What form is your search and my search for God and His Kingdom taking? Are we hoping to discover it by accident? Or are we diligently pursuing it?

It is possible, of course, for us to discover the Kingdom seemingly by accident since, with God all things are possible and He is forever searching for us. We may, like the man who found the treasure in the field, come upon God's Kingdom without planning and without purposefully pursuing it! But, it is more likely that like the pearl merchant, as we earnestly seek God, we will find Him. His Word affirms this! "Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find." (Matthew 7:7) In fact, our search for a deeper knowledge of God and His Kingdom is intended to be a life-long one. There is always more of Him and His Kingdom to be found and claimed! And the beauty of the discovery becomes more apparent the longer we hold it in our hands!

As these parables affirm, there will always be 'aha' moments of surprise discoveries of truth and grace along the Christian journey, if we are open to them. God loves to meet us in this way! Likewise, deep insights of wisdom and godliness will be gained through persistent search. New discoveries and deeper

experiences of the Kingdom of heaven will come as we pursue God through the intentional study of His Word and continual fellowship with His children.

As one commentator says, “However a man discovers the will of God for himself, whether it be in a lightning flash of a moment’s illumination or at the end of a long and conscious search, it is worth anything unhesitatingly to accept it.”

2. How much do I, do you, treasure the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth? How much are we prepared to give and sacrifice for it?

The finders in these parables joyfully and excitedly gave everything they had. It’s not that they bought their way into the Kingdom – that’s not how it works. No. For them it came down to this ... everything they held dear paled in comparison and was readily sacrificed for the surpassing value of experiencing heaven, of knowing God, and of following Him! Are you there yet? Truly? If not, perhaps you need to take time to contemplate the Kingdom’s worth. Peace, Joy, Love, Forgiveness, Blessedness, Security, Eternity are the essence of this Kingdom! What could possibly hold greater value?

As you consider your life today, what is your “pearl of greatest price”? What is your most treasured possession? The Kingdom of Heaven outshines any possessions, wealth, power, fame that we might attain here on earth. It is “flawless” in its beauty and its worth. And it is eternal. We can acquire a lot of

'stuff' here on earth ... some of it very useful and enjoyable ... but we cannot take it with us when we die. The knowledge of God and His transforming power within us is the only thing that truly lasts for all eternity. Even our earthly relationships, as wonderful and treasured as they are, cannot come close to touching the wonder and beauty of the relationship that we can have with God, Our Creator.

Do you treasure the Kingdom of Heaven on earth? Do you treasure, above all else, the knowledge of God's abiding presence and the enabling you receive through God's Spirit to do His good and perfect will? Do your daily attitudes, actions, and choices reflect how much you treasure it?

God, our Creator, continually seeks us out as a valued treasure and pearl of great price. His searching brought Him to earth, in human form. He lived and died, sacrificing all to claim us as His own. He bought us back from Satan's hold, redeemed us through the shedding of His own blood, and He now crowns us with glory and honour (Psalm 8:5). This theme, of our worth and value to God, flows throughout the Scriptures. We need to believe it! You and I are His treasure and He loves us without end. And just as He sought us, He urges us to seek Him and His Kingdom ... because in seeking and finding we will find life abundant! In seeking and finding we will gain the character traits of His Kingdom ... kindness, patience, compassion, love, grace and mercy.

The parables of the treasure in a field and the flawless pearl are intended to help us to re-define what has true value. When we truly find this treasure/this pearl that is the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, everything else will pale in comparison and we'll joyfully give all for the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ and His resurrection power. And when we truly find this treasure/this pearl that is the Kingdom of Heaven on earth we will come to know, without a doubt, that God loves and treasures us above all else.

May we each, seek His Kingdom and His righteousness today ... and every day.