

SERMON TRANSCRIPT



Ormskirk Christian Fellowship
Sunday 31 August 2014

Matthew 13:44-46 (NIV)

The Treasure of the Kingdom

⁴⁴ **“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.**

⁴⁵ **“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.**

This morning I want us to spend a few minutes looking at these two parables to begin with, and then at the principles they teach ... very simple outline today, the parables then the principles. First, a story about hidden treasure. **“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”**

I know that sounds a bit strange to us, but this kind of thing would have been common to the people of that time and culture. Nowadays we put our money into savings, investments, loans, bank deposits, stocks and shares, bonds, securities, property or whatever ... assuming of course we have spare money in the first place. But in those days there were no banks as such, so it was common for men to take whatever they considered valuable, and to bury it in the earth.

This was particularly so in Palestine because Palestine was a place of war, a battleground. The history of that place is littered with records of one battle after another, one war after another. When battle was done, the conquering side would steal, loot and plunder whatever they could find, and so very often, if there was a new battle looming on the horizon, people would take all the valuable things from their home, carry them out into the fields and bury them in designated places where hopefully they'd be able to retrieve them later. Very commonly done.

In the parable, we don't know if this man is working in the field or if he's there for some other reason, all we know is that the field belongs to someone else. Anyway, he's doing whatever he does ... maybe ploughing it or tilling the soil or whatever, when he comes across treasure buried in the ground. Immediately, he puts it straight back where he found it, then he goes off to sell every single thing that he possesses. He liquidates everything that he owns to buy that field, in order that he may gain that treasure.

In that day and culture, it would not be uncommon to discover treasure in a field like this. In Matthew 25 Jesus told a story about a man who gave talents to his servants, do you remember? The first two took their talents and multiplied them, but the third one, being very timid in his investment approach, decided to bury his in the ground. The story was intended to show us a man who was not wise, a man who should have invested what he had and earned interest on it. But it also tells us that it was common for people who didn't want to invest their money, to bury it in the earth. People who chose to hang on to it instead. So we've got this man in the field, he finds this treasure; he puts it straight back into the ground, then he sets off to buy the field. It's a strange thing for us to imagine, but this was actually very common.

What perhaps isn't so obvious, at this point, is that the parable also introduces an ethical issue. “Wait a minute” some people would say, “he's not doing the right thing”. How can Jesus tell a story where a man does something like that? He's uncovered someone else's treasure, he hides it again without telling the man who owns the field, then he starts scheming about how he can buy the field as well? Surely what he should have done is pick up the treasure, take it straight to the owner, and say to him, “Look what I found in your field.” He might have hoped, secretly, that he'd receive some kind of reward, but surely that's the honest thing to do, isn't it? A lot of people can't get their heads round such apparently unethical behaviour.

Well friends, let me help you with that. It's not the main point I want to be focussing on here, but if we don't get pass it, there's a danger that we'll get stuck on this page and you'll miss the rest of the message. There are three things you need to know about this ...

First of all, Jewish Rabbinic law said, "If a man finds scattered fruit or money, it belongs to the finder." That's exactly what the law said. "If man finds scattered fruit or money, it belongs to the finder." So, according to Jewish Rabbinic law, the man in the field would be perfectly within his rights to have his treasure and keep it. End of. We might have a problem with that, but none of the Jews listening to the story would have thought that his actions were unethical at all.

The second thing you need to know, is that the treasure hidden in the field did not belong to the man who owned the field. If it were his, he would never have agreed to sell the field would he? Certainly not before he'd dug it up first! He didn't know it was there. It probably belonged to a previous owner who'd buried it years before then died in battle, or by accident, or maybe just from natural causes, but for whatever reason, he'd not been able to retrieve it. The treasure belonged no more to the owner of the field, than to the man who'd found it; he just got lucky.

But there's a third thing to notice here too. This man who did find the treasure was VERY fair. If he WASN'T an honest man, what would he have done? He'd have filled his boots, packed up his treasure and been long gone! He'd have put it in his own field. Why go to the trouble of buying the field when you've already got the treasure? "Maybe his conscience bothered him" some people suggest, "or maybe the field belonged to a relative of his, and he wanted to do the right thing?" Well, it's possible, and I did think about that, but then I thought of something else too ... this will show you how MY mind works ... why didn't he just take SOME of the treasure, enough to raise the cash he needed, and then use that money to go back and buy the field ... not bad, huh? He wouldn't need to sell his possessions, he could use the proceeds of someone else's treasure to buy the land, the owner would still receive the full asking price, but once the paperwork had been completed, he'd end up owning the field as well. Result!

He didn't do that. He took the treasure that he'd found, treasure that already belonged to him according to Jewish law, and put it straight back into the ground. He didn't use any of it for the purchase ... instead, he sold every single thing he possessed then went back to buy the field with money of his own, just so that he could do what was right to get that treasure. There's no lack of ethics here, no lack of integrity ... nobody was defrauded.

Well, interesting though all of that might be, none of it is the point of this particular parable. I just thought I'd throw that in for free! The real point of the parable is the man found something so valuable, he sold everything he had in order to get it. He was so overjoyed, so ecstatic; he was willing to do whatever it took to get hold of that treasure.

So ... let's have a look at the second parable. **"The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."** The word used here to describe the merchant is *emporos* in the Greek, which means wholesale ... he was a wholesaler, a man who would go around buying in bulk, then selling stuff to the retailers. He spent his days scouring around, seeking fine pearls. It was very common in those days for men like him to be entrepreneurs. People who wanted to diversify their investments would put money into pearls. They were the most valuable gems in the world at that time. If you had pearls, you had a fortune. People went to incredible lengths when it came to pearl hunting. They would search particularly in the Red Sea the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. There were plenty of pearls to be found in those places, but they were often found at great cost. Many people died in the process.

They had no modern paraphernalia for pearl diving back then, basically what they did was tie rocks to their body then jump off the side of a small boat. They'd descend to the bottom of the ocean amidst all the monsters of the deep, the sharks and whatever else, and they would scour through the mud trying to find oysters. They'd hold one long, deep drawn breath, and pray that they didn't sink so deep that their lungs would burst and they'd die. They were willing to take those risks because (so long as they surfaced again), they hoped to bear treasures of perfection and beauty that were worth quite literally an unnamed price ... they were incredibly valuable.

So valuable, that when Roman emperors wanted to show people how filthy rich they were, they dissolved pearls in vinegar and drank them in their wine. Pearls back then were perceived just like diamonds today. Even in the book of Revelation, when God begins to describe heaven, it's as pearls in its beauty. So this man went around seeking and dealing in fine pearls, because

they were such a good investment. Pearls went up in value, and once you had them you could diversify too; you could put some of your money in the ground, some into pearls, and some into land and property or whatever else ... that's the way that people ran their businesses.

Doesn't it seem ironic then ... just an aside here ... that the one thing you're not supposed to do if you're a wise investor and you know about these things, is put all your eggs into one basket? In both these cases, that's exactly what they did. The first man sold everything he had to buy just one field, and the second man sold everything he had to buy just one pearl.

Well, what are the principles from these two parables? Hopefully, you've understood a bit more about them now ... but what are the principles? I'm going to give you six principles.

PRINCIPLE ONE: The kingdom is priceless in value. Both parables are designed to teach us about the incomparable value of the kingdom. We're talking about salvation here; we're talking about Christ himself, the knowledge of God, the preciousness of being in His kingdom, and the privilege of having fellowship with the King. Nothing even begins to compare in value. In God's kingdom there is treasure rich beyond comparison; it's beyond comprehension, incorruptible, undefiled, unfading, and eternal. Jesus is talking here about heavenly treasure lying hidden in the fields of a poverty stricken, bankrupt, broken world; treasure so abundant that it can bless every poor, miserable, blind, naked, sinful inhabitant of the earth for the rest of eternity, and yet it remains undiscovered by so many people.

Salvation and forgiveness and love and joy and peace and virtue and goodness and glory and heaven and eternal life ... all of these things are in that treasure, and the finest pearl is Jesus, the salvation of God, the joy of being in the kingdom. Of all the excellent pearls in the world, of all the treasures that anyone might find in a field, salvation outstrips every one of them. It's a priceless gem, and yet the world knows so little about it. They do not understand it at all. The world has wrapped itself up in all kinds of other stuff, all of which is ultimately worthless.

PRINCIPLE TWO: The kingdom is not superficially visible. The treasure in both these stories was hidden, right? The pearl had to be sought. It wasn't just lying around on the surface. The treasure of the kingdom is not obvious to men. The value and the preciousness of the kingdom of heaven, its merits, the prize of salvation is not apparent to men; they don't see it, although it stands there and looks them in the eye. The world looks at us and they don't understand why we're all about worshipping God. They don't understand why we want to give our lives to Jesus. They don't understand why we want to live a certain way, make certain moral choices, follow certain codes of ethics that go against the grain of our deepest lusts and desires. They don't understand why we prize this kind of thing so highly, when it means so little to them.

The kingdom is not superficially visible. Even though the message is here and the Word is here, the world doesn't see it. They're blind. Most people never look beyond the surface. They're so busy fiddling around with the baubles and trinkets and toys and pebbles and all the other stuff that lies on the surface, that they never get to the treasure underneath. That's why Jesus says in Matthew 7:14, "But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." In other words, it's not immediately obvious ... it must be sought; it must be pursued.

PRINCIPLE THREE: The kingdom is personally appropriated. That's the crux of both parables. The kingdom is personally appropriated. We see one man in verse 44; we see another man in verse 45. We're dealing with individuals here. Each of them finds something that's specifically for him and appropriates it for himself. Jesus is teaching us here, I think, that it's possible to be **sort of** in the kingdom, under the dominion of God, but not a member of it. Let me explain. If we're alive on earth, we live under God's rule, because God is sovereign ruler of the universe, right? In a sense, we're already living in His kingdom, because He's in charge, BUT that doesn't make us subjects of the King; we're not personal members of His kingdom just by being here.

It's not enough to be under the influence of the kingdom. It is not enough to be in the shadow of the church, it's not enough to be under the influence of Christianity, just to shelter in the

branches or be touched by the leaves; there must be personal appropriation. At some stage in life, in order to become a member of the kingdom, we must grasp the value of it. Too many people spend their lives pursuing stuff that's not valuable. It was pearls back then; today it's diamonds. I don't know if you've heard about what goes on to find diamonds, but it's amazing. Let me give you an illustration ... there's a company called Consolidated Diamond Mines based on the sea coast of Southwest Africa, and they run operations night and day in a never-ending hunt for diamonds. I read an article about them a while ago, and it said this:

"Diamonds are to be found embedded in marine terraces; ancient Atlantic beaches of wave-rounded boulders, stones, gravel and sand, which congeal into a concrete-like substance called conglomerate."

"In that conglomerate the diamonds are lodged. This is covered in places by fifty feet of wave-deposited or wind-blown desert sand. Mammoth earth scrapers and bulldozers claw away the sand that covers the marine terraces, so that other scrapers and bulldozers can back out the conglomerate, taking it down to the ocean beach bedrock where the conglomerate averages five feet in depth. Then, hydraulic excavators and twenty-man gangs with foot-long nylon brushes meticulously sweep out the conglomerate residue in the ancient bedrock's crevices and hollows, until uncovering the diamonds."

"After it is scraped and dug, brushed and dynamited from bedrock, the conglomerate is hauled to a processing plant where its boulders, gravel and sand are pounded and milled, washed and bounced, crushed and grated away. The remaining fifteen percent concentrate is sloughed into a phara-silicone solution with a 3.0 specific gravity, so that anything with a 3.5 specific gravity sinks to the bottom and can be separated. Finally, the residue is put through a spot-fluorescent operation to find the diamonds, which then go into a bin to be sifted, sorted and cut."

Then, very helpfully, right at the end of the article, the managing director added, "We treat 180 million parts of material to get one part diamond." Wow.

Basically, when you have a diamond, you know what you have? You have a diamond. That's what you have. It can't do anything for you. Can't make you feel better. Can't give you peace. Can't solve your problems. Superficially maybe, but not really. You just have a diamond. God offers men something that is really valuable ... priceless treasure ... but it's incredible to see the extremes that men go to, searching for other stuff that's ultimately worthless.

PRINCIPLE FOUR: The kingdom is the source of joy. If you look at verse 44, it was for the joy the man had when he found the treasure, that he sold everything to buy it. Here, Jesus is acknowledging something that I've believed all my life. The basic desire of every human being on the face of the earth is to be happy. People want to feel good. Now you may not agree with me there; you may be thinking, "Well, I know some people who love to be miserable." Perhaps you do. I can't see the attraction myself, but if being miserable is what makes them happy ... that still proves the point doesn't it?

Jesus said in John 15:11, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" or in some versions "full". People want to be joyful; people want to be happy. It is all bound up, isn't it, in the treasure? True joy comes in the discovery of the kingdom of heaven and of Jesus Christ. For the sheer joy of it, the man sold everything he had to take hold of that treasure. God wants us to be happy. God wants us to rejoice. The Bible says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Friends, we should be the most rejoicing people on earth, because we're the ones who have found the treasure.

PRINCIPLE FIVE: The kingdom may be entered from different circumstances. There are quite a few similarities in these two parables. In both cases there's a man, in both cases he finds something of great value, in both cases he understands its value, and in both cases he's willing to pay any price for it. Quite similar, aren't they? But there's one big difference.

In the first story the man just comes across the treasure. In the second story, the man knows exactly what he's looking for. What does this tell us? Well, the man in the field probably wasn't even searching. He was probably just going about his normal routine ... working, ploughing, building or whatever. There he was in the field, minding his own business, doing whatever he normally did, and then quite unexpectedly, he stumbled across a fortune.

There are some people who enter the kingdom like that. Think about the apostle Paul. Was he seeking the kingdom? Not on your life. He thought he was already in it. He was on his way to Damascus to kill Christians. The next thing he knows, God blasts him from heaven, he lands in the dirt, and he gets redeemed. He was just doing his thing. He was just ploughing his field and he stumbled into a fortune. How about the Samaritan woman? She was thirsty. She came to a well for a drink of water, and she went home redeemed. What about the man born blind? All he really wanted from life was to be able to see, and he went away redeemed too.

But then there was the other man, the one who looked for the pearls. He knew what he was searching for. He wasn't the mundane man ploughing the field. He wasn't the guy content with the secular or the mildly religious; he was seeking something of genuine value. He was the one seeking God and virtue and things of true worth, but what he didn't realise was that it was all wrapped up in just one pearl ... just one. He was looking for pearls (plural); he was looking for things (plural) that were valuable. He was looking for goodness and honesty and virtue and forgiveness and peace and joy. Maybe he thought they were all over the place, in a multitude of gems ... the shock for him was that it was all found in one. Everything was in just one pearl.

There are people who search, and there are people who stumble into it. There are probably combinations of both, right? But the kingdom can be entered from different circumstances. Why am I telling you that? Because sometimes I think we hinder God; we expect that stuff is going to happen like this, or like that, and we're not sure what to make of things that aren't quite how we thought they would be. There are people who search, and there are people who stumble into it. So long as they arrive in the right place I don't think God really minds, do you?

PRINCIPLE SIX: The kingdom is made personal by a transaction. In both of these stories, the idea of buying or being bought is central. Some of you might be getting nervous at this point and thinking, "Whoa, wait a minute; you're not suggesting they bought their salvation are you?" Well listen carefully, because in a sense the bible says they did, but you need to understand in what sense. Certainly the stories themselves are talking here about real treasure ... real pearls, real things that were bought with real money ... but that's only the stories.

The bible makes it quite clear that we can't buy salvation with money. A rich man can no more buy his way into the kingdom, than you can shove a camel through the eye of a needle. That's the way Jesus put it. The bible says that salvation is God's free gift; not of works lest any man should boast. We don't purchase it, in fact we can't purchase it; not by using money, goods or any merits of our own ... but it IS bought nonetheless.

There's a well-known verse in Isaiah 55 that says, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost." People say, "Look, there it is, there's the proof ... "without money and without cost" ... salvation is free!" But what they forget is that it also says, "come and buy." We DO buy it; we just don't buy it with money. There IS a purchase here. There HAS to be a transaction. There HAS to be an exchange. The transaction is this. You give up all that you have, in exchange for all that God has for you. Did you get that? I give up all that I have, and God gives me all that He has. It's mind blowing, almost inconceivable. How could anyone ever say "no" to an offer like that?

Conclusion

The kingdom is priceless. The kingdom is hidden. The kingdom must be pursued. The kingdom is joyous. The kingdom can be entered from different circumstances, but in every case, the cost is to abandon all that I have ... that I might receive all that God has for me.