

“The Preciousness of the Kingdom”  
(Matthew 13:44-46)

To this point, Jesus has shown us several things about the kingdom of heaven. He has shown us how God has ordained that it grows -- through the preaching of the Gospel --, how it will be a mixture of both believers and unbelievers until the very end of the age, and how it will begin very small but become very great and powerful. I didn't bring this out before, but Jesus, in every case except that of the parable of the Sower, gives two parables to make each point, each differing just a little bit in its emphasis. And the way He does it is quite interesting. He gave us the parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven to tell us about the growth of the kingdom. This morning, He will give us the parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price to show us how valuable the kingdom is. And at the beginning and at the end of these two pairs of parables, He sandwiches them in with the parables of the Wheat and the Tares and the Dragnet to show us the mixed character of the kingdom. There has been a lot of discussion in academic circles about the significance of structure in the Bible: why it is that the authors and speakers arrange the things they say as they do. The answer is that they do it for emphasis. In those days they didn't have paragraphs and italics and underlining to emphasize what they were writing. The way they did it was mainly through structure and repetition. Here, there is a definite structure and a repetition of ideas in these pairs of parables. Jesus then is underscoring for us the importance of these truths, so that we might pay special attention to them. He wants us to know that the kingdom will be a mixture of both wheat and tares, so that we will make sure that we are of His wheat and are not tares ourselves. He wants us to know that even though this is the case, the kingdom will still belong to Him -- it will still be His wheat field. He wants us to know that even though it may appear that the kingdom of heaven is not very influential in the world now, that one day it will be. We need therefore to trust His word and not our eyes.

But there is one more thing Jesus underscores for us this morning, and that is the value of this kingdom and what it is we should be willing to give up in order to enter into it. What He tells us is that, ***The kingdom of heaven is worth more than anything else in the world, and we should be willing to part with everything in order to have it for ourselves.***

Now let's look first at the similarities and difference that there are between these two parables. Notice that in both parables there is a treasure. In the first parable the treasure is something hidden in a field. We aren't told what it is, but it seems to be something which the man could not pick up and run away with. He had to buy the field in order to get it. It was probably something attached to the land, like a vein of gold, which if he wanted to have it, he had to buy the land that it was buried in. In the second, the treasure is a pearl of great price. This is a pearl of such beautiful and unique quality that it is worth a great deal. Another similarity is that in both cases, the men who found them were willing to sell all that they had to get that treasure. This treasure was worth more to them than anything and everything else they had, and they would gladly give it all up to have it. But the difference is that the man who found the hidden treasure wasn't looking for it. He appears to have simply stumbled across it one day. But the merchant who found the pearl of great price was looking for it. He was actually searching for fine pearls, and came across one which was so precious, that all the others became unimportant to him.

Now what do these things mean? First we need to see that the treasure in both cases is the kingdom of heaven. Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field . . . The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls” (vv. 44, 45). It is the kingdom that is precious. Now why is this true? Well, we need first to understand that the kingdom does not refer to the same thing as in the parable of the Wheat and the Tares and in the parable of the Dragnet. There the kingdom is the whole world. It has in it both those who will be saved and those who will be lost. Everyone is born into it in this sense. No one needs to seek it. Simply by being a member of the human race, you are already in it. No, what is being referred to here is the redemptive kingdom of God, the same thing referred to in the parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven, the one that is growing and will eventually fill the earth. Those who are a part of this kingdom are those who will also inherit the eternal kingdom of God. To have this is to have eternal life. But not to have it is to be an heir of hell. This by itself certainly makes the kingdom of heaven a treasure worth selling all for. But it's not only for this reason that it's called a treasure. The main reason comes from the relationship which everyone has who is a part of it: They are in relationship with Christ, and through Christ with God. To the true Christian, heaven wouldn't be heaven without Christ. To put it graphically, if God decided to dwell in hell, and to leave heaven to everyone else, the Christian would rather be in hell, than in heaven. It is God's presence that makes heaven what it is. It is mainly for the sake of God and Christ that the saint wants to be there. This is treasure indeed: to be in union with Christ and to have God as your Father.

Now, we are told that this is so great a treasure, and it appeared to be so to both men, that both of them

were willing to part with everything they had in order to have it. They were willing to sell all that they had in order to purchase the treasure. Now this doesn't tell us that kingdom is for sale, and that if we want to buy it, we too must sell all that we have and buy our salvation. But it does bring out a very important aspect of the Christian life: to be a true Christian, to be a child of God and an heir of the kingdom, we must prize and value the kingdom of heaven above everything else in the world and must be willing to part with all of it, for the sake of Christ. One faithful minister of old put it this way, "Heaven must be to you like the treasure hid in a field; or like the pearl of great price. If you would have heaven, you must take it as your whole portion. You must in your heart part with all other things for it, and it must be your manner actually to part with them whenever they stand in the way of your getting forward towards heaven. If you would have heaven, you must sell your worldly profit and your credit, . . . the good will of your neighbors, . . . your worldly pleasures and conveniences, and whatever stands in your way. Many flatter themselves that they shall obtain heaven without this, and think they have a right to heaven, though they were never brought to this, but they are sure to find themselves disappointed" (Edwards, Exhortation to Natural Men). He says again, "And this point may be further illustrated and confirmed, if it be considered, that the Holy Scriptures do abundantly place sincerity and soundness in religion, in making a full choice of God as our only Lord and portion, forsaking all for him, and in a full determination of the will for God and Christ, on counting the cost; in our heart's closing and complying with the religion of Jesus Christ, with all that belongs to it, embracing it with all its difficulties, as it were hating our dearest earthly enjoyments, and even our own lives, for Christ, giving up ourselves, with all that we have, wholly and forever, unto Christ, without keeping back anything, or making any reserve; or, in one word, in the great duty of self-denial for Christ; or in denying, i.e., as it were, disowning and renouncing ourselves for him, making ourselves nothing that he may be all" (Edwards, Religious Affections).

Certainly, as the author said, this is a principle brought out again and again in the Scripture. We must love Christ above all and be willing to part with everything to follow Him. Listen to what Jesus says to us. In Matthew 6:24, He says, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." He says in Matthew 16:24-26, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" He says in Luke 14:26-33, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with ten thousand *men* to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace. So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions." As we saw this morning, Jesus said to the rich young ruler, when He saw that his riches were his god, "If you wish to be complete, go *and* sell your possessions and give to *the* poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Matt. 19:21). And when Peter pointed out to Jesus that he and the other disciples had actually done this, they had left all to follow Him, "Jesus said to them, 'Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life'" (vv. 28-29).

The kingdom of heaven is precious, more precious than anything else in this world, more precious than everything in the world put together. Those who see this are willing to do what Christ calls them to do. It's not difficult for them. They know they're really not losing anything. What they gain is infinitely more valuable. Listen to what the apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 3:7-11, "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." Is this what is in your heart this morning? Are you willing to leave everything behind to follow Christ, if He should call you to? If you are a true Christian, you will. No one can hold onto the world and serve Christ. Christ must be our greatest treasure, or He is not our treasure at all.

But lastly, notice that one of these men was not looking for this treasure, but the other was. This tells us

that sometimes the kingdom of heaven is revealed to some unexpectedly, while at other times it is revealed to those who are seeking for it. Some walk around in the dark, day after day, until the Lord shines His light on them and suddenly converts them. Maybe they heard the Gospel again and again, but didn't see its value, because their eyes were blind. But then the Lord gave them sight, they saw their sin and the judgment due to them for their sin, they saw the preciousness of Christ and how He offers life to poor weary sinners, and in their hearts they left all and came to Him. But with others, the Lord does a thorough work of conviction first. He awakens them, shows them their sin and their need for Christ, but then allows them to wrestle for a while without relief, before He changes their hearts and brings them savingly home. But notice that in both cases, the Lord is still the One who makes the difference. He must open the eyes, or they will never see the preciousness of the kingdom.

As we close this morning, I would ask you if you have seen it. Is Christ more precious to you than anything you have? Is He more precious than anything you could have in this world? Have you left everything in your heart to follow Christ? If He asked you to give it all up for Him today, would you do it? If so, then you are His true son and daughter. The kingdom of heaven really is your treasure, and you have done what these two men have done. The Lord says that He has prepared a table for you that He wants you to participate in, in just a few moments. But on the other hand, if there is something more precious to you than Christ and His kingdom, if you are not willing to give up everything to follow after Him, then you are still in need of His grace. The table is not for you this morning, but this Word is: Repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. May the Lord open your eyes to see the preciousness of Christ, and may He open your heart to receive Him. Let us now prepare to come to the Table through prayer. Amen.