

## **Jesus' Kingdom Movement**

### ***The Gospel of Matthew***

## **Jesus' Kingdom is Worth Everything**

### ***Matthew 13:44 – 46***

Neighborhood Church of Dorchester, October 20, 2019

#### **Introduction: God's Kingdom is Worth Your Whole Life**

This week, I was reminded by certain people that Jesus' kingdom is worth it. It's worth my whole life. One of those people was Congressman Elijah Cummings. Elijah Cummings served the people of Baltimore in many ways, one of them being as a 12 term Congressman in the U.S. House of Representatives. But he also served Jesus. He sat in the front row of his church for forty years. His pastor said that Elijah Cummings would come up to talk to him about his sermons. Elijah Cummings' memory was so good, he remembered his pastor's sermons better than his pastor did. That's how much Elijah Cummings held onto the words of Jesus in his heart, and let them grow, so that he could be an agent of Jesus' kingdom, even in these difficult days.

Another person who reminded me that Jesus' kingdom is worth it is Larry Kim, who is the senior pastor at Cambridge Community Fellowship Church. Larry was at the funeral of Dira's niece, Paris Barbosa, who died in her mother's womb before she was born. It has been a tearful time. Larry and his wife Jenny lost their second child nine years ago. Their son Emmet had a genetic condition where his organs were formed on the outside of his body. Larry and Jenny made the difficult choice to carry Emmet to birth, knowing that Emmet's condition would be fatal, and that he would last only a very little while outside the womb. They suffered a mighty blow. And they took time to grieve. But they still love Jesus, are passionate about Jesus' kingdom, and Larry is still in ministry as a pastor. It was a sacred moment when Larry said a few words to Paris' parents yesterday at the funeral.

#### **Relevance: Looking at the Kingdom**

Now and then, we need reminders that Jesus' kingdom is worth it. He is worth our whole lives. The passage we're going to look at today remind us of that.

Last week we looked at two parables – parables number 3 and 4 in this set of 7 parables in all – about what the kingdom of God feels like as an outsider. It feels bad. It feels like planting in your garden a bad seed which becomes a bad plant and attracts birds you don't want. You don't want to bring people into your life who just consume your resources. And it feels like going to receive bad hospitality from a bad neighbor you don't want to be involved with. If we are feeling selfish, then the kingdom of God feels bad. And that attitude is what places people on the outside of God's kingdom.

But what is it like to be an insider to God's kingdom? If we value other people enough to want Jesus in their life, and we're willing to love them with the love of Jesus, because Jesus is the only God who loves them this much, and is the only person who can heal and transform them, then God's kingdom is like treasure. In fact, it's not just a good seed planted in good soil. It's a hidden treasure hidden in the ground. It's so outrageously valuable that we could give up everything for God's kingdom and we would feel like we're getting a bargain. Whatever we give up to see the reign of Jesus on earth, it's a steal!

So Jesus is comparing the two short parables about the high cost with the two short parables about the great bargain. Parables 3 and 4 are about how costly the kingdom feels from the outside. But parables 5 and 6 are about how valuable the kingdom is from the inside.

#### **The Kingdom is Like...**

We're going to look at two very short statements Jesus made, recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 13:44 – 46. Let me read these parables:

'The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field,  
which a man found and hid again;  
and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.  
Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls,

and upon finding one pearl of great value,  
he went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

Now there are layers of meaning here. Maybe he’s saying that we are his treasure and his pearl, and that he gives up everything to gain us. That would fit. Or, maybe it’s flipped around. Maybe he is the treasure and the pearl and that if we sold everything we have to gain him, that would still be worth it. And not just worth it, but a bargain. But if we pause to read this carefully, Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is like these two things.

The kingdom of heaven, which in Jesus’ definition is the reign of God in human hearts and lives, is about both him and us. He does it first in his own physical body by the Spirit. And he makes it possible for us in our physical bodies by the Spirit. So he’s really talking about the relationship that God wants to have with each human being. He’s not saying something to just boost our self-worth, or to let us know how much he’s sacrificing. He’s actually saying that to have the kind of relationship that God wants to have with us costs him and costs us both everything. It’s like asking, ‘What would you give to have an ideal relationship with your parents? Your friend? Your children? Your spouse? And what would the other person have to give?’ It involves both parties, so it’s costly. But Jesus is also saying that we need to look at the reign of God – the kingdom of heaven – from the inside, from how God sees it. You can’t just look at the outside.

### **The Man and the Treasure: v.44**

Let’s look carefully at the first one. “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

How many of us like to find bargains? We go to the thrift shop, or Boomerang’s in JP, and peek in. Books for 50 cents. I found my blue blazer for \$5. We want to find something worth it. Jesus thought he himself was worth it. Jesus thought that if you lost everything and gained him, you’d be getting a bargain. Imagine that, those of you bargain hunters. Jesus thought he was worth it. Why?

Now in this story, the man seems really, really smart, versus the merchant, who seems really, really dumb. I’ll get to that in a minute. Let’s understand this first guy. He’s probably a hired hand. He’s working someone else’s field. He finds a treasure buried there. Evidently, it’s too big to try to get out himself. Maybe people could see him if he tries to take a little at a time. So he hides it again, and goes away to sell all his stuff, get the cash, and buy the whole field.

Notice that this guy in Jesus’ parable gives up *everything* he has. That is strange. Ordinarily, of course he’d have to sell *something*. He might sell part of his own land or his crops or maybe even his animals. Then he’d buy that field. But it’s just a field. The impression Jesus gives is that the field looks ordinary, from the outside. From the outside, this guy pays more than he should. Right now, if there were people watching this man, they would have thought, “Man, you are crazy!” Because what do they see? They see an ordinary field. They might say, “Hey, wait, wait. It’s just a field. You’re going to exchange everything you have for that...FIELD??? That ordinary thing???”

But he has a secret. His secret is that he’s not just buying the field. He’s buying a treasure, stuck in there, worth more than anything he could ask or imagine!! He’s seen it with his own eyes. No wonder Jesus says this man is filled with JOY. Can you imagine his JOY?!? What a great deal he’s getting!!! That treasure is more than worth it. It’s beyond being worth it. It’s a no-brainer! AND he’ll be able to tell his friends what a great deal he got! (That appeals to some of us, right? You know who you are!)

God loves you so much that He bought the whole planet, the whole universe! And He gave everything He is as God. AND He thought He was getting a *BARGAIN*. God values you more than He values Himself.

Years ago I ran into a woman at a meeting. She gave me her business card. And I think there was a typo on her business card because it said her name, and then, for her title, it said, ‘Treasure.’ Now if God were to design business cards for each of us, I think He would write, ‘Treasure.’

But it goes even deeper. So you thought that God feels nice warm feelings when we take in Jesus’ word, right? Jesus’ word is good seed, and we allow it to be planted in our hearts, which is good soil, and God feels nice, like He’s accomplished something as a gardener. But Jesus throws back the curtain and says, ‘Come on the inside. Let

me show you what God feels. When you do that, when you receive the seed of God's word into your heart, that is so precious to God, that even though He gives everything for it, He still thinks it's a bargain.'

Illus: A friend of mine used to work at the men's shelter on Long Island before the bridge was found to be unsafe for cars and got taken down. It was a challenging place for a woman to be a case worker because some of the men had mental health issues; some were sex offenders. But it was a co-worker that was really tough. He would talk and act in ways that were awful. And in response, she had awful feelings and thoughts towards him. But she would pray for the men and for this co-worker especially as she drove to work. And sometimes she would be in tears by the time she got there. Because God loved these men. And God put her in touch with how He treasured them, and treasured any way they had received anything He said, and treasured every opportunity for them to receive more.

My wedding ring and my family photo albums are valuable to me. But those things are not *objectively valuable*. Jesus claims that he is *objectively* valuable. He is *objectively* worth it, to every single person. That's a tall claim, isn't it? But nothing brings that out more than the second parable.

### **The Merchant and the Pearl: v.45 – 46**

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it."

Pictured on this slide here is a Filipino Canadian man who inherited this 48lb. pearl from his aunt. Apparently she was a collector of strange objects, and didn't know how valuable this pearl is. The pearl is as big as a cow's head. He later learned that it could be sold for \$90 million. It could be 1,000 years old.

This parable is similar. Here is a man who makes his living by trading fine pearls. Pearls were the most expensive and valued jewelry of the Roman empire – only one in ten thousand oysters created a pearl (this was before people cultured oysters) and divers would have to go through great danger to retrieve the oysters. Cleopatra apparently had a pair of pearls worth around 9 million dollars each. If you are a successful pearl merchant, then, you travel to far off places seeking pearls and you come back and sell them to the wealthiest clientele. You took high risks, and you mixed with the best people. You are a connoisseur of the best pearls. You need to know the value of your wares – how to evaluate each pearl for its beauty and rarity, what to look for in terms of luster, color, shape, size and perfection of surface.

I think most of us would say that we'd like to be like this merchant right BEFORE he finds the pearl of great value. You want to have a lot of options, a lot of potential. You're in search of fine pearls. The world is literally your oyster. But of course to be a successful merchant, you don't have the luxury to savor each pearl merely for its own sake, right? Ultimately you need to trade your pearls for money. Ultimately the pearls are a means to maximizing your profit. So you need to be good at bargaining, trading, diversifying, and generally, the more pearls you have in your portfolio the better. Everything is a means to an end. To something more. If you think you're this person, the way you can tell is if you're generally hoping for something else, something more. Things and even people might have some value for you, but they're even more valuable for your future. You're hoping that you got a bargain. You're hoping that one of these things will be worth it, that in one of these areas of life, you'll get back more than you put in. You're utilitarian.

So this is a man who after a lifetime of working with fine pearls, one day finds THE pearl. It is THE pearl – incomparable in beauty and value, and he decides he *must* have it. He simply *must* have it, not for business, not for profit, not for other pearls, but just for THE GREAT PEARL. So, Jesus says, he goes and sells everything he has in order to buy this pearl. He doesn't just sell his other pearls, mind you, he sells every last thing he has for the sake of this great pearl.

Let's be honest. This is why the merchant seems really dumb. The man who bought the field with hidden treasure? Really smart. The merchant? Really dumb. It just doesn't make sense from the outside. This guy has dissolved his business, he has no more capital, no more possessions for that matter, only this one pearl. At the end of the day when he goes home, if he still has a home, what does he have? His pearl. It's just him and his pearl. Can you picture him, sitting on the park bench, just admiring his pearl? Has he gone mad? Is he like Gollum, raving on about 'my precious'?

Maybe. But maybe there's something else there. HE FELL IN LOVE. You see, on the inside, this is a story about love. The merchant has bought this pearl not for profit, not for what the pearl is going to get him but for love. Somehow all his life's training has prepared him to recognize the value of this pearl. All his life, it has been his destiny to own this pearl. He has found his treasure. He loves it. He has given up maximizing profit, he's given up the search for other pearls, but he has found an object worthy of his love. Therefore, for the first time, he loves. He was utilitarian, now he's a romantic. On the inside, his heart has completely changed. For him, this is worth it!

And Jesus says that this is what the kingdom of heaven is like. A merchant in search of fine pearls, encounters the perfect pearl, and finds his life goals totally changed yet are totally fulfilled. So this applies to our process, not to God's. God already values us and loves us. He bestowed value on everything and everyone because He loves us. So the parable applies to us and our process of loving the kingdom.

Illus: Let me tell you how I've seen God at work in our friend up the street. Years ago, our friend who I'll call Sarah made Thanksgiving dinner. Her three adult children had asked her to make dinner, and gave her money for it. So Sarah made a lavish Thanksgiving dinner. She thought it would be special because she and her husband had just gotten a painful divorce. She thought it would be a good time to share with her children. But apparently they double booked themselves or neglected to tell her or even spitefully did this, but they didn't come. They went to their fathers' place, without even telling her. Sarah didn't make Thanksgiving dinner again for years. She went over to friends' places, she went to visit with other family, or she went to serve dinner to the homeless. It was so painful, and her children didn't even apologize for this. It was the beginning of a very rough time in Sarah's life where she tried to escape using alcohol and drugs. But more recently, Sidney began to experience Jesus in a real way. A few women in the neighborhood met to read the Bible. She joined in. During this time, Jesus did amazing things; he helped her with a bad roommate situation; he helped her have the self-discipline to clean up the house she had let fall apart for years; he helped her cut down on substances. In October, not too long ago, one of Sarah's granddaughters, Renee, came to live with her. This was a huge sign of victory for Sarah. But in November, Renee asked Sarah to cook Thanksgiving dinner. Sarah at first didn't want to, but Renee prevailed. Sarah almost had panic attacks while she was cooking as she relived how she had felt twelve years ago and wondered if she remembered how to cook these dishes, but she prayed and asked Jesus to help her, and she experienced peace and calm. She cooked off and on for two days, and when she was done, she had cooked a delicious 14 course dinner almost just like the dinner she had made twelve years before. And for Thanksgiving dinner, two of Sarah's three adult children came. They apologized to her finally for what they had done to her twelve years ago. And they said how proud they were of her. It's because Sarah had found the pearl of great price – God's kingdom, Jesus reigning in her – and other people were seeing it.

So let's step back and let me make four points that flow clearly out of these two parables of Jesus.

### **Point 1: Jesus is Ultimately Valuable**

Jesus is worth it. But you don't have to be that smart to figure out how valuable Jesus is. I want us to see the kingdom from the inside: Do you know the value of Jesus? Let me come back to the notion that Jesus' claim is that he has objective value, not just sentimental value to me. After all, if Jesus is THE way God is bringing heaven in to earth, bringing what is eternal into what is temporary, bringing the kingdom of heaven into our everyday world, then it follows that *anything eternal has to do with Jesus*.

### **Point 2: It Takes Everything You Have**

Jesus takes everything you have and everything you are. In both parables, the person sells all he has. The man buying the field sells all he has. The merchant seeking fine pearls sells all he has. An authentic experience with God takes all that we have. To be a part of the kingdom of heaven, to help establish heaven on earth, takes all that we have. But you get something far greater than what you gave. And that leads me to Point 3.

### **Point 3: But You Get Back Even More**

You can't out-give God. You don't earn it either because you can't claim to deserve what you receive. You know what this is like? It's like trading in your old, beat-up, junky car for a brand spankin' new one. What a bargain! Or your old, beat-up, junky obsolete computer for a brand new one. What a bargain! That same principle of upgrading is true on the level of your life. Having Jesus will cost you everything you are and everything you have. So Jesus is not 'free'!!! But Jesus is A BARGAIN. You have your human life, and Jesus wants to upgrade it to his human life, which is fully joined with God. Jesus is not free. But he is a bargain!

**Point 4: Jesus Does This For Our Joy**

In both parables, the man and the merchant find immense joy. When we have Jesus, we find that kind of joy. Jesus had a lot of joy thinking about redeeming us. Hebrews 12:2 says, Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.