

Matthew 13:44-46

The kingdom of heaven is so valuable that it is worth any price.

A Stu asked me a few months ago if I was happy to do a sermon. I said Stu are sure? You do realise I put people to sleep for a living... I'll try not to do that today...

Intro

I want to start with two stories, and two questions.

The first starts here, at a rubbish tip **[slide]**. It's in a town called Newport in the UK, with a population about the size of Hobart. Now there is something special about this rubbish dump. For you see, hidden, somewhere, in those mounds of rubbish, is a hard drive. And on that hard drive are close to 8000 Bitcoin. Now for the uninitiated, let me say that Bitcoin is a digital currency and it has recently skyrocketed in price. Those 8000 bitcoins are now worth about \$70m. This is James Howell **[slide]**. He's the poor bloke who threw out the hard drive before the price went up. And for the last decade he's been unsuccessfully begging the local council to let him dig for it.

Treasure hidden in a field.

The second story is about this man **[slide]**; Elon Musk. You might have heard of him or some of his companies; PayPal, Tesla, Space X. He's pretty much Tony Stark. And he's worth about 21 billion dollars. But for the last decade he's been spending all his wealth on what he calls 'The long term ultimate objective – the holy grail.' He's spending everything he has to put humans on Mars.

A pearl of great price.

[I'm starting with these stories for a reason. it might not be as obvious as these two, but we're all digging something. We're all leveraging everything we've got for one goal. What is it for you?]

This morning I want to unpack these parables as Jesus tells them. I want to get to the heart of what he is saying in this part of Matthew and put our own lives under the microscope. Before we do that, pray with me. **[prayer]**

If you're a note taking/outline/dot point kind of person, then there's a rough outline in the service sheet. Let's start with some context:

At the beginning of this Matt 11-13 series we examined the different responses to Jesus. Many in the crowds and cities doubted Jesus was the real deal - he just didn't line up with their expectations. Others - including the Pharisees - opposed him directly because he condemned their empty religion. A small few however have decided to follow-him. These are the disciples.

Over the last few weeks we've moved from the *King* to the *Kingdom*. Jesus says it's like scattered seed. It's like wheat and weeds. And in verse 36 Jesus and the disciples have left the crowds altogether and have gone into a house to talk some more.

Which brings us to verses 44-46. Another two of these funny little stories called parables. You and I aren't used to talking in parables so let me orientate us before we go on...

Well, a parable **[slide]** is two things;

Firstly, a parable is simple story that places two ideas side by side for the purposes of teaching. (repeat). A comparison.

Secondly, parables are *earthly* stories about *spiritual* things; which means they proceed from the *familiar* to the *unfamiliar*. They have simple everyday subjects; seeds and weeds, goats and gates. But they reveal things about God himself.

However in 2000 years the things familiar to the disciples are not necessarily familiar to us. So I want to do two broad things this morning; *first* I want to spend some time unpacking the '*familiar*' – the earthly context of the parables; or the mental picture painted in the disciples' heads – before we look at the '*unfamiliar*' – there is a spiritual truth Jesus was teaching those first listeners and it's there for us too.

Rereading the passage: Matt 13:44-46

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*

3 verses. 2 parables. 1 big idea.

Let's start with the **Familiar**...

Parable 1 → *The Hidden Treasure* [Slide]

Let's start by looking at this man... Now we know he doesn't own the field – because in a minute he's about to go and buy it. So if the field isn't his, how did he come to be digging in it?

Chances are he's there *ploughing the field* so that the next crop can go in. He's a day labourer. He is poor. And his life *wears him down*. Day in, day out he works under the hot sun with only an ox for company. And to what end? The crops he grows fill another man's barn.

But then, unexpectedly, the plough strikes something hard. Bending down he finds a clay jar; inside there are coins, jewels, clothing – more than he could ever *hope* to earn. He counts it up and it looks to be someone's life savings. In fact, we know that it probably *was* someone's life savings.

We have to remember that this was an age before safety deposit boxes or banks. If you had something of value you hid it under your mattress or in your house. And if an invading enemy was camped outside the city, *or* if you were about to go on a long journey *or* if you had been called up to fight in some war then you couldn't very well leave it under the bed because chances are it wouldn't be there when you got back! So you'd do what most people in this situation would do today – you go and bury it. You bury it somewhere known only to you. You bury it somewhere safe. And when you come back you'll go dig it up again.

Except the thing is, you might *not* come back again. That invading army may well kill you and your family. That long journey might be the last you take. And so it was not uncommon that these treasures lay forgotten (and unclaimed) in fields all over Palestine.

This reality gives rise to the prevailing ethics of the day. The original owner is presumed dead, so according to the Rabbis – it's finders-keepers. But to be sure, he sets about acquiring that field, so when he returns to lift out that treasure there can be no argument that it is his.

In summary; a man stumbles across something of such great worth, he willingly pays everything he has to acquire it. Jesus says '*The kingdom of heaven is so valuable that it is worth any price.*'

Parable 2 → *The Pearl of Great Price* (NKJV) [slide]

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*

‘again’

The first thing that jumps out at us in this parable compared to the first is the man himself – the first was poor, but the second is rich. And not just Gina Rinehart rich. He is Bill Gates rich. Pearls were the ultimate luxury item of the ancient world. They were in the same category as gold. In fact, at almost the exactly same time in history that Jesus is having this conversation with his disciples, Mark Antony gives Cleopatra a pearl which by today’s standards is worth about 60 million dollars. And remember, the man in the parable is a pearl **merchant** - so he buys and sells pearls like this. In the first century, a man like this is *inconceivably* rich!

The second difference is that unlike the first man, he’s actively searching. But look closely, he’s looking for fine pearls (as he would do day to day) but instead he finds one of ‘great value’. He hits the pearl jackpot. This is one special pearl. This is a once in a lifetime pearl. This is a Mark Antony/Cleopatra pearl.

In his joy he sells everything he has –millions of dollars in stock and assets; to obtain this rarest of treasures.

So what is the main point? Both happen upon something of incredible value, and both willingly trade everything to obtain it. Jesus says; *the kingdom of heaven is so valuable that it is worth any price.*

Now the unfamiliar... what is the spiritual analogy?

2 points; cost and joy.

What does the kingdom cost?

Well on the one hand the kingdom is *free*;

The Ephesian church were wondering the same thing because Paul writes to them; *‘For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.’ (2:8-9)*

You can’t pay money to become a Christian. You can’t buy your way into God’s family. If God owns the universe, what need does he have for your money? There’s no way we could pay the price anyway! No, it is by **grace**. *Grace is the unmerited favour of God. His kindness to us; completely underserved.* Grace is the means of our salvation.

On the other hand, it’s not free at all. The man in the field *‘went and sold all he had’*. The merchant *‘went away and sold everything he had’* to buy that pearl. The kingdom of God costs everything we have.

Now let me be clear. Jesus is NOT saying that to follow him you have to sell everything you own. That is certainly not the pattern of the new testament, although he does ask of it some individuals, then and now. He certainly asked it of the rich young ruler (Matt 19:16-22). Let’s compare him to the men of our parables;

Compare the Rich Young Ruler; in Matthew 19:16-22 [slide]

16 Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

17 "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."

18 "Which ones?" he inquired.

Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, 19 honor your father and mother,'[a] and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'[b]"

20 "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

22 When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

How does the Rich Young Ruler compare to the pearl merchant? Both were rich, both found the greatest treasures. But one is able to sell everything and the other one cannot. One goes away filled the greatest joy, one goes away depressed. What is the fundamental difference between these two?

The difference is in the state of their hearts. The difference is **joy**. See Jesus put his finger on the one thing the Rich Young Ruler loved more than anything else, his money; and while he worshipped that, he couldn't worship Jesus as well.

Jesus says that your material wealth will follow your emotional wealth. What do I mean by that? Well emotional wealth is what we value in life. It's what we work for, chase, sacrifice for. It is the thing that on which we will happily expend our time, our money, our energy. It might be family, acceptance, sex, status, money. And it'll be different from person to person. Where is your emotional wealth? Let me give you two tests to find out.

The first is the solitude test. Archbishop William Temple once wrote that '*religion is what you do with your solitude*'. What Temple is asking is - what do you daydream about? Where does your mind go when you have nothing to think about? When you lie in bed waiting for sleep to come what do your thoughts effortlessly go to? What do you fantasize about? The subject of those unbidden thoughts – *that* is your true religion, that is what you worship.

The second test is what Tim Keller calls the '*nightmare test*'. What is the thing in your life, that if you were to lose it, it would make your life no longer worth living? The thing, that should it go, would cause you the greatest pain you could imagine. *That thing* is where your emotional wealth is. And where your emotional wealth is – well that's where your material wealth will follow. Let me give you an example...

This is tisagenlecleucel (tis-a-jen-lek-LOO-sel), 'Kymriah' [slide]. It's about 10-50ml of yellow salty water, with a few white blood cells mixed in. And yet it costs close to US\$500,000. That's roughly the average Australian net worth; the value of everything you've saved and bought in your lifetime. Who in their right mind would hand over their life savings for a bag of blood cells?

Well I would, given the right circumstances, and I imagine you would to. You see, that 50ml of straw coloured fluid is the cure for B cell lymphoma; a type of blood cancer. And if you got a phone call tomorrow saying that your son or daughter had this blood cancer, you wouldn't hesitate to sell everything and take out a loan. If it were Sam or Soph, I would do it gladly – and I bet you would too - because \$500 000 for the life of your child – well that's cheap. You see, it is easy to transfer material wealth once you've transferred your emotional wealth; we do it without hesitation, we do it with joy.

That is the difference between the parables of Matthew 13 and the rich young ruler. The farm worker and the merchant saw the value of their discovery; and the price – although it was great, although it cost them everything they had – was easy to pay, and they paid it with joy. Because they had transferred their emotional wealth. The rich young ruler went away sad because he had not.

The image is that of a man and his son at the beach. The son is so excited to be there, and fills his hands with sand; clutching it tightly to his chest. The dad finds a shell – iridescent, beautiful, faultless. And he hands to his son. But his son becomes upset; he can't take hold the shell – without letting go of the sand.

Putting it all together...

The parables of Jesus are a mirror. They force us to examine our own hearts. And I don't make the grade. I, and I imagine you do too, relate to God in two common ways;

- I feel that for everything I give up, God *owes* me something in return. You could call this transactional religion. And when I don't get what I expect, my disappointment turns to anger or bitterness.
- Or else I feel like that rich young ruler; I keep all the commandments, I live a good life, but I go away sad because I can't let go of this world; I want the shell but I can't let go of the sand.

Remember those tests? Solitude and nightmare? How can we possibly let go of those long enough to take hold of Jesus? We are so broken that we can barely lift that treasure out of the dirt. And yet the solution to this problem – our death grip on the things of this world – is the treasure itself, the gospel. The unbelievable claim that the creator of our universe would enter the world as a man, live a perfect life and die in our place so that we might live. And that SINGLE truth, is the treasure that devalues all else.

The apostle Paul understood it. He wrote to the Philippian church (Phil 3:8) [slide];

8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them *GARBAGE*, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ

Paul considered all else like the rubbish in that landfill at Newport. He could pay any price because he knew Jesus had paid the highest price. And Jesus is no hypocrite, we can give up anything, we can give up everything, because he did it first.

I want to finish with Phil 2:6-11;

Jesus 'being in very nature^[a] God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, **he made himself nothing**
by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming **obedient to death**—
even death on a cross!

⁹Therefore **God exalted him to the highest place**
and gave him the **name that is above every name,**
¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Knowing Jesus is the treasure that renders everything else worthless. It's worth more than bitcoin in a landfill. It's more important than sending humanity to Mars. What will you do this treasure today? Will you take hold of it or will you go away sad because you can't let go?

Let's pray.