

The Treasure and Pearl

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[0 : 0 0] We are doing a little summer series in the mornings on some of the parables of Jesus, and we have a couple parables before us this morning. Parables are very simple stories in the Gospels, and Jesus, he gave a good many parables. He took very, very ordinary circumstances of life in the Greco-Roman Jewish cultures that he lived in, oftentimes things like agricultural settings, very normal, ordinary circumstances, and he would tell simple stories about them in order to give a cosmic level lesson. One of the things to say at the outset, we mentioned this briefly last week, but it's just to note that Jesus gave us stories.

God gave us stories. When you flip through the Bible, one of the things you notice overwhelmingly is that most of the biblical text is narrative, it's story. And when you read through the Gospels, Jesus wanted to communicate the most important idea of his coming, the Kingdom of Heaven through story. And I think one of the reasons for that, as we mentioned last week, is that the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God has so many dimensions, so many aspects to it, so much depth that you really need story to be able to convey it. Stories do something that lists of facts cannot do. So if you read a list of facts, probably your emotions will not be stirred. Probably your will will not be pricked. Probably your desires will not be changed. But stories, narratives can do that. They take truth and engage the whole of the soul, every bit of who you are. And that's the power of stories. I think that's why Jesus communicated to us through parables, and he gave them to us 2,000 years ago, and

I think he wants us to sit with them. So for a couple thousand years now, the church has been sitting with these parables and just letting them soak over us, and they're here to change us. Will you come today and be changed by these parables? That's what they're here for. So let's do that. Let's think about that. We have here two little stories. One about a man who finds treasure in a field while he's farming. Another little story about a merchant who goes and buys a great pearl. Very short, very simple, but profound. So let's think about this. First, the fact of the treasure in the pearl, the identity of the treasure in the pearl, and then finally finding and seeking the treasure in the pearl. Okay, so first, the fact, the reality that there is a treasure, there is a pearl. The first parable we learn about this man who is farming, and he's working in a field. He doesn't own the field, and he finds treasure buried somewhere in this field. And the simple thing that we learn here is that this guy found treasure. Finding treasure seems, I think, when I first read this, a little bit distant from our current environment and culture. I can't imagine a situation in which I would be messing around in life and find treasure. But it's what we all dream of, right? It's what every child longs to do in the back garden is to find treasure. But that's exactly what happens here. And at first you think, is this sort of a mythological legendary rendering of treasure finding? You know, Robert Louis Stevenson created the pirate genre, our Veriona Edinburgh author in the 19th century. And we have pirates of the Caribbean and all these types of stories today because of Robert Louis Stevenson and Treasure Island. And so when I read about finding treasure, I think Treasure Island, things like that. But actually, finding treasure was somewhat common in the first century, in the ancient world. And the reason for that is because there are no banks. So if you've got currency, if you've got gold, if you've got silver, if you've got gemstones, which were the most common precious item to have in the first century, you can't take it to RBS. You know, you can't go anywhere like that to the Bank of England or wherever and deposit. Nobody can hold it for you. You have to hold it. And it's very precious and very valuable. And so you would either bury it underneath your home or you would hide it in your home or you would go out to the North Field and find grandfather's great oak tree that he planted a century ago and you would walk 20 paces to the left and you would bury your treasure. Right? And that was a normal thing. And in fact, I found recently a book this week, prepping for this, I found a book published in 1933 by a man named G.F. Hill.

He was an Oxbridge guy. I can't remember. Oxford or Cambridge one. And he wrote this book called *Treasure Trove, The Law and Practice of Finding Treasure and Antiquity*. It's a study of Roman and Jewish laws concerning the finding of treasure. So there were Roman and Jewish laws concerning the finding of treasure. This was a normal thing. This actually happened. It happened most commonly. A couple situations the commentators talk about. If you were very, very normal, your little town, your little village, your community would probably in your lifetime be overrun by an enemy. And you know, when the orcs are coming, you've got to get out of the city. And what you do is you bury all your goods and you go and you hope that you can come back. But quite often you can't. And maybe a generation later, a farmhand finds what you buried when you had to flee. Or maybe you're a pearl merchant and you travel all the time. You have to go to the sea to get pearls and come back. And it's very probably when you're living in the first century without the greatness of contemporary medicine that at some point you're not coming back. And so you would bury your treasure, your goods. And what happens here is that there's a farmhand. This man is middle class or poor. He does not own the farm. We learned that in the parable. And he finds treasure while he's tilling the field. And we learn here that he goes and sells all of his possessions.

[6:16] He totally liquidates everything he has just to purchase the field. Why? Because GFL's little book on Roman and Jewish laws of treasure helps us understand that the only way the treasure is yours is if you actually own the property. So if you're the farmhand and you find treasure, the man you work for owns that treasure unless you go and you sell everything you have and you buy the field. So that's what happens in the first parable. In the second parable, which is making the same exact point, so we'll connect these two, the pearl merchant. He's a salesman. And normally how this works is let's say he's a pearl merchant in the interior of Israel, of Palestine, of the area of Palestine. He has to travel to the sea to where the fishermen are, to the Mediterranean. And he goes and he goes to the market of the fishermen and he purchases pearls from them, takes them back into the interior of the country, takes them to a very elite market because pearls are extremely precious in the first century and sells them at a high price. And so pearls, gemstones, all sorts of stones in the first century were the most valuable things you could possess.

There's a, I don't know if this is myth or fact, but there's the story of Cleopatra owning a pearl that was so valuable, she said she would give everything to possess it. And scholars will talk about Cleopatra's pearl, valuing at four billion pounds in modern money in terms of what it would purchase in that time. Pearls were very precious, very elite. This man finds a pearl and he's a merchant. And so it's quite nuanced parable because what do you expect? He's going to go sell that pearl. You know, he's going to acquire it so that he can sell it, mark it up at 200%, how much is jewelry marked up? I don't know, a lot, I'm sure. And he's going to go to the market, he's going to sell it at a huge markup and make an enormous amount of money. And instead, what he does is he liquidates his life. He sells everything he has. He gives his business away just to acquire the funds to possess the pearl. Right? So in the first instance, the man gives everything he has away, liquidates his life, turns his life upside down so he can buy the fields not for the sake of the property, not because he wants the field, but because he wants the treasure.

In the second instance, the pearl merchant liquidates his whole life, not so he can go make a ton more money at the market, but so he can just have this thing. He can possess it. What's the point? I think the commentators will talk, I mentioned this last week, about one point parables, two point parables, three point parables. I think this is a one point parable. And the point of this one point parable is this, that there is a treasure available to you that is so valuable, it's worth giving everything away for. There is a treasure available in this life that is so precious, it is worth completely reordering your entire life to get it. And this is, it's extreme, total liquidation in order to possess the treasure and the pearl. And you say, you know, when they find the treasure, when they find the pearl, it's not that the treasure, the pearl just changes a little bit of their lives.

It's not that they say, you know, I really need to become a better person. That's what the treasure calls me to do. I need to become a better person. I need to be more productive. No, when the treasure and the pearl is found, it's a complete reordering, flipping everything upside down. There is something so valuable in this life, a real treasure that it is worth giving everything away in order to possess it. That's the point of the parable. Now, the question's obvious. Secondly, what is that treasure? What is the pearl? We know where Jesus is saying here, there is a treasure so valuable, it's worth giving your life away for. What is it? That's the second question, the second point. Now, we're told here the answer basically pretty explicitly by Jesus. He says in verse 44, the kingdom of

heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. And so last week, I mentioned, if you were here with us, we started basically a mini series inside of our mini series. So we're looking at parables for short little series, but for a few weeks, we're looking at kingdom parables. And lots of the parables Jesus says, the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven is like this.

And so he tells us here that he's talking about the kingdom of heaven. And so he says to us, the kingdom of heaven is a treasure so valuable, it's worth giving everything away for in order to possess it. That's the simple point he's making. Now, the great command Jesus gives us in Matthew six, seek the kingdom of God first above all else. That's the command form of this parable. Seek the kingdom of God above all else in your life. And when you do that, you will get everything you want. It's that valuable, it's that precious. And here we have the parable form of that same exact command. But there's more depth to it.

[11 : 36] I think we can just take a few minutes to dig into it a little bit more. When you look across Matthew's gospel, the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God synonyms, those two phrases all over the place is the very first thing that comes out of Jesus's mouth is the language of the kingdom of heaven. And we're told in Matthew four that Jesus traveled all around Galilee and his early ministry proclaiming the kingdom of heaven. And we're told he told in the Beatitudes, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And so the idea of the kingdom is really the heartbeat of Jesus's ministry. It is what he talks about all the time. And so you've got to have a grasp of the kingdom of heaven, a sense of the kingdom of God in order to really understand the gospel itself and what Jesus is doing across the gospels. And we said last week, if you were with us, that in the previous parable, the parable of the mustard seed, the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed.

It starts out so small and yet it blossoms into this great tree. And Jesus was teaching that the kingdom of heaven there is the power of God to connect heaven and earth. It's a fulfillment of Daniel chapter four, the great world tree where the tree, the tree of life connects heaven and earth. And so the first thing that the kingdom is, is God's power to bring heaven down to earth. The second thing the kingdom is, is the reality that when God does that, he's going to gather a people, birds of the air into his nest, that he will gather a people and he will bring them home. So the kingdom is the power of God to connect heaven and earth. It's the people of God gathered in the tree of life himself, Jesus Christ. And lastly, we learned that it is the permeating presence of God, him distributing his glory like leaven or yeast throughout the entirety of the earth in the second coming of Jesus. That that's the idea of the kingdom of God. It's the reign of God. It's the power of God. I read a book this week, looked at a book this week about this from Donald Craybill. He wrote a really famous book about the kingdom of God. I think it was 1973. That's worth looking at. It's called the upside down kingdom. He's very helpful. This is what he says. He says, the kingdom of heaven is not a kingdom in heaven. It's not a kingdom where you're hoping to go to heaven, though we will when we pass away. The kingdom of heaven is not a kingdom in heaven, but from heaven that comes to earth. And when you open up the gospels and you see the face of Jesus Christ, you can say, Jesus says, the kingdom of heaven is here because heaven, Jesus himself, God himself has come to earth. He's connected heaven and earth. I was helped also this week reading about this. Someone said it like this. Sometimes one of the ways to define something, especially a really difficult concept like the kingdom of God, is to ask the question, well, what is the opposite of the kingdom of God? So you can always define a term by first thinking, okay, well, what is the exact opposite of this? And the answer I think in the Bible is the opposite of the kingdom of God is what the Bible calls the kingdom of this world. And the kingdom of this world is a kingdom that is ruled and reigned by Satan, by the flesh, by the sin capacity and power in every single human soul, by death, and by what the Bible calls the world, the orientation towards sin and evil in this life. And the story of the kingdom of this world is that God made this world to be the kingdom of God. And Satan and humanity, Satan tempted us to run away from that and to reject the power of God in our lives. And when Jesus comes announcing the kingdom of heaven, what we have here is a new power that is actually an older power, a power that's much older, the ancient of days, the power that stands long behind anything like the kingdom of this world, the power over the kingdom of this world, to renew and to restore and to bring peace, to bring the forgiveness of sins. And so when Jesus goes all throughout the gospel of Matthew, he talks about the kingdom and then he exemplifies the kingdom. And the way that he shows us what the kingdom looks like is he heals diseases. He brings people back from death to life.

He says to people, your sins are forgiven. That's what the kingdom looks like. That's the reality of the kingdom. That's the power of the kingdom. What is, okay, let's move on. What is the treasure? What is the pearl? The treasure of the kingdom, the pearl of the kingdom. In some sense, it is the kingdom itself, but I think we can get a little more specific than that. The treasure, the pearl, what is that one thing that is most precious in our lives, in this life, in this human life we're living, that we are called to reorient everything for? What is the one thing? What is the one treasure? It is not the cross.

[16:37] It's not the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ is the means to the treasure. The cross of Christ is the glorious means to get the pearl, to get the treasure, but what is it?

I think here's one way to say it. When we think about the kingdom, we know that there's a king, there's a lord. He has a lordship over all of life. He has a lordship over the bugs. He has a lordship over the plants. God created everything. He has a lordship over space and time and land and the seas. He's got lordship over everything. And that's good news. That's part of the king's kingdom. But the real treasure and the real pearl is not just God's lordship over, but his lordship of. In other words, it's like saying, we don't just have a God that is lord over our lives, over space and time, over the events of history.

We have a God who in Jesus Christ came down and said, I want to be lord of your life. In other words, the treasure and the pearl is that Jesus Christ came to this world as a wiggly little baby in order to get close to you. That's the treasure. The treasure is that you can have a relationship with the living God. The pearl of the kingdom, the treasure of the kingdom is that God wants to know you and that you can know him. And the message of the kingdom, the cross of Christ is that Jesus Christ went all the way down into death so that he could get near to you. So that you could commune with him, that you could know him, that you could have something in your life that can never be taken away. And that's a living relationship with the real God. That's the pearl. That's the treasure.

That's the thing that's worth flipping everything upside down in your life to get. Reordering it's a call to total surrender in your life. Finally, what do we do? Thirdly and finally, how do we respond? What do we do with this? And a little bit of a paradox. Finally, let's say that when it comes to the kingdom, when it comes to the pearl, when it comes to the treasure, some of us need to seek in order to find and some of us need to remember that we have been found and we need to start seeking again. All right, I get this from the Old Testament where we have what is sort of the corresponding command of the kingdom of God in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, we have the command, seek first the kingdom of God above everything and you will have the treasure. You will have the pearl. You will have the one thing that will really satisfy you, a relationship with Jesus Christ himself. In the Old Testament, we have a really similar command in Jeremiah 29, which we'll be looking at in September. Seek me, God says, and you will find me when you seek me with all your heart. Seek first the kingdom of God, seek me, God says, and you will find me when you seek me with all of your heart. Now, some of us come today, I think, on the early side of that probably. There's people in this room from all over the world on this very, this July full of visitors, from all over the world, all different backgrounds, perhaps all different religions. And the command today that comes over us in this is to seek God in order to find him. Another way to say it in more modern language is this. This parable, underlying this parable, is the very fact that every single one of us as human beings are actually seeking a treasure in our lives. We are seeking a pearl. We are seeking the one thing that will bring us fulfillment. We are seeking all of us. We long for the one thing that would actually satisfy us. Charles Taylor is a Roman Catholic philosopher and thinker in Canada. He wrote one of the most important books of the last 20, 25 years or so called *A Secular Age*. He's trying to understand the conditions of the past couple hundred years that brought the secularism of the modern world to us in this book. But one of the things that he's very helpful in the book is he says that underlying every single basic human desire is a longing for fulfillment. So that's the one word he says you can think on. What do humans want? And Taylor says we want fulfillment. And the way he defines fulfillment is he says fulfillment is purpose that is bigger than yourself and being valued or loved by somebody that you value. So he says fulfillment happens when those two things come together. When you find a purpose in this life that is much bigger than yourself on the one hand and being loved and valued by somebody you think is valuable on the other hand. Bringing those two things together you find fulfillment. Every single one of us are walking through life looking for that. And so when we live this very modern life chasing accomplishment after accomplishment

after accomplishment but not living for something bigger than ourselves and not hearing the pronouncement that we are loved and found precious by the one who is most precious in all of existence then there's a lack of fulfillment in our lives. And the Christian philosophers call that the search for religious consciousness.

[22 : 03] A search deep down in the heart of who we are. A consciousness all the way at the bottom for real religion. True religion. And true religion is to be able to say I exist for something enormous that will never go away. And I am loved from top to bottom by the most precious God himself and that can never be taken away from me. That we want that we long for that. That is actually what you're looking for. Now even if you're chasing something else in this life right now the Bible comes and says that is what you want. That is the desire beneath all your desires. It's the treasure. It's the pearl. It's what you're really chasing after. And so I think very simple this passage just calls us to ask the question what are the little bitty pearls and the little bitty treasures that are only relatively valuable that you're chasing right now in your life. Do you really have fulfillment?

Do you really have purpose and love that will not let you go? The objective meaning itself and the subjective love that will never leave you. You can only get that in relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ. That's the meaning of the parable. That's the thing that's worth giving your life for. One pastor I heard teach on this passage recently he said that some of us maybe today have been searching for fulfillment and joy and meaning and we've maybe been around the treasure, the gospel. Jesus Christ our whole lives but we've been fundamentally, functionally ignoring it actually. And he puts it like this, you know when all the people heard that old Joe the farm hand who had found this treasure was selling all of his possessions to buy such a mediocre field. You know they would have said something like I've walked by that field a thousand times and there's just nothing special about it. And they don't know what Joe know, Joe found treasure but they've walked past that field a thousand times and it's just a normal field and this guy's flipping his life over for it. And it is very possible that you've walked past the field a thousand times and have yet to actually see the treasure. That there really is a living God who has come to make a relationship with you through the power of the cross of Jesus Christ. To

Yohiko Kagawa, Japanese Christian died in the middle 20th century. He's one of the more famous, sorry more important 20th century Christian world leaders that's very unknown I think to people. Wrote over 150 books, was a Christian social reformer in Japan and just a powerful evangelist, To Yohiko Kagawa. But I love what he says about his own search for the treasure. He says I am grateful for, he grew up as a Buddhist but he says this, I'm grateful for Shinto, for Buddhism and for Confucianism. I owe much to these faiths in terms of my upbringing yet they could never meet me at the moment of my heart's deepest needs. He writes I was a pilgrim journeying on a long road that had no turning. I was weary, I was foot sore, I wandered through a dark and dismal world where tragedies were thick. Buddhism teaches great compassion but since the beginning of all time who has ever said this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. You know I learned a lot from Buddhism but Buddha could have never said my blood has been poured out to cleanse the world for the forgiveness of sins, to put me right with God. There's only one place to find fulfillment and forgiveness and I love that will not let you go. Meaning, purpose and love all found in the one treasure which is a living relationship with the living God. Lastly, finally for the rest of us, if you're a Christian today, if you're a growing Christian today, some of us previously we need to actually seek the gospel, the treasure for the first time and find it. We've passed about a thousand times. Others of us here today we need to remember that we were found in order to start seeking again. And so the command, the call of this passage is to seek the treasure, seek the pearl, commune with the living God, remember what you've been given, what's been offered to you. And so it could be possible today that for some of us we found the treasure a long, long time ago but we have neglected and forgotten over time to actually reorder our life and to liquidate and to give away ourselves for the treasure and the pearl.

And we've basically taken that one treasure and put it in one of the drawers of our lives as a compartmental treasure next to all the other pearls and treasures that we seek after.

And so I think the call of this passage is that God cannot just be an aspect of our lives but the treasure of our lives. The very focus, the most precious thing to us is Jesus Christ, the most precious thing to you, the most precious person to you in your Christian life. A test that I've heard others talk about in the past and we'll close with this, a test that I've heard others talk about that I think really gets at the functional question. What is your functional treasure, your functional pearl in

this life? When you're by yourself, when you're in total solitude in the midst of utter quiet, when you're alone, when you're not being watched by anyone, there is no publicity, no public at all. What is the one thing that most commonly comes to your mind and your heart in those moments? So what do you think about? What resources do you go towards pondering and reflecting on, desiring in the moment, so the quiet, when no one else is viewing you, nothing is around you? And Tim Keller puts it like this, I don't think I can improve upon this so I'm going to quote him. He writes it like this, he says, can you look at anything in your life and say, nothing is more important to me than Jesus? If it's a choice between that and Jesus, if it's a choice between that and Jesus, if it's a choice between that and Jesus, can I suffer the loss of anything?

[28 : 38] For Jesus' sake, last test, have you been working in an environment, a neighborhood, a social community of some kind, an online community perhaps, for years and nobody knows in that environment that you are a follower of Jesus Christ? Can you ask yourself that?

Do the people around me know what my treasure is, what my pearl is? Is my image more important to me than the kingdom of God? What is most precious to me in all this life? Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness which came to us by a gift, the righteousness of Jesus given for us at the cross and you will have everything, fulfillment. Let us pray.

Father, we ask that you would make Jesus himself our treasure and pearl, that we would liquidate, that we would reorder, that we would flip everything upside down, that we would give our lives because you Jesus gave your life for us. And so we ask, Lord, that we would have desire to seek the one who found us first. So give us this morning, Lord, a fresh and hopeful and joyful vision of such a beautiful gospel, loved even as we are known as sinners, loved all the way into purity that is a gift from Christ. And Lord, you want to know us, you want to relate to us. We thank you for that. So I just pray that someone many in here today perhaps would draw closer to God no matter what's going on in life, no matter how bad it may be for friends who are sick, for friends who are struggling, for friends here today who are anxious and maybe struggling with depression or whatever it may be, God, that all of us would find Sabbath rest in the fact that we have the love of Christ that cannot be taken away. No matter what the world thinks, no matter what anybody thinks, thank you for such a wonderful gift. And we pray that we would all treasure the treasure. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.