

What's Your Treasure?

Matthew 13:44-52 (NIV)

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. ⁴⁷ "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸ When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁵¹ "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied. ⁵² He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

This morning we have before us parables about what the kingdom of heaven is like. In two of these earthly stories teaching a godly truth we learn that the kingdom of heaven is so valuable that it is worth selling everything you own in order to have it. The man who found the treasure in the field sold everything in order to buy that field and properly own the treasure buried in it. The merchant who found the pearl of great value sold everything in order to have that one, singular pearl.

Jesus is teaching us that the kingdom of heaven is the most valuable thing we could ever have, but what is the kingdom of heaven? That's where the third parable comes in. It's like a net catching good and bad fish, which then are sorted by the fishermen. You hear shades of the reaping of weeds and wheat in Jesus' parable from last week. The only thing in this world that acts like this net is what God does through his Word. Two weeks ago Isaiah 55 told us that God's Word does not return to him empty but accomplishes the purpose for which he sent it. The Holy Spirit, working through the message of what God has done to take away our sins and save us from hell, will either bring people to believe this message or people will choose to reject it and harden their heart against it leaving nothing left for themselves except judgment. In other words, the kingdom of heaven is what God does through his Word to cast a net on all sinners, including us, calling us to believe that he has paid for our sins and given us a forever heavenly home.

So, what's your treasure? You're in church. You know what the right answer is. Your treasure is God. Otherwise you wouldn't be here. That's easy, Pastor. Give me a harder question. Okay, here it is: What on earth is so valuable that you would sell everything in order to have it?

This question was tough for me to answer. These parables of Jesus immediately got me thinking about material possessions. Is my laptop which I do all my work on my most valuable possession? Is my car? My house? (But I actually don't own my house here – the church does. So I can't count that.) I don't own a RV. I don't own vacation property. I don't own a business. My Xbox maybe? My movie collection? Maybe there are some of the things that I listed off that you might consider your most valuable possession, the thing you would sell everything else to keep. But that's all just stuff. It will decay and fade. Some of that stuff may outlive you, but you can't take it with you when your life is over. Don't put your hope in stuff because it will all fail you and none of it can save you.

Then I arrived at my answer. I would sell everything I have, I would drain my savings, I would give up my house and car and Xbox and movie collection, the clothes off my back, if it meant keeping my family – my wife and my children. I'm thinking you might say something similar. There's probably not one material possession that you would sell everything for, but you would do it for a life, for a person you love. You would pay whatever the medical costs were if it meant hanging on to your loved one, taking care of them, improving their health. You would pay that exorbitant ransom to get them back if they were taken from you. I treasure my family.

Now for the harder and more uncomfortable question: Do I treasure my wife and kids more than I treasure my God and what he has done for me? If it came down to it and I had to make a choice between having God and having my family, what would I choose? Whom do I treasure more?

That's a horrible decision to be faced with. I can very easily say that I would give up my house, my car, my Xbox, my movies so that I can have God. I know that I treasure him more than my possessions. But get rid of my family so that I can have God? One person I asked this question to said without hesitation, "If my spouse made me choose between them and God, I would show them the door." I want to say that I would without hesitation say the same thing, but my mind keeps running back to, "But I love my family. I work for my family. I care for my family, and I know that my family cares for and loves me." Would I give up everything, including my family, to have the kingdom of heaven, to have the message of what God has done for me?

While we wrestle over what our most valuable treasure is, examine again the value of the kingdom of heaven. Interestingly, value is often determined by what someone is willing to pay for it. Things don't have intrinsic value or a set price that never changes. The value changes as supply and demand changes, and the value comes down to what someone will actually, not theoretically, pay.

God "sold" everything that we could have the kingdom of heaven. He "sold" everything by giving up his throne in heaven, his position as God free of suffering and hardships, and instead took on human flesh. Why? So that he who made the law as God could now live under the law as a man. So that he who is eternal and immortal as God could now suffer, bleed, and die as a man. He did this so that I could know what he has done for me, how he sold his life to pay for my sins and wipe out my debt against him. He did this not just for me, but for my wife, for my boys, for all of you. He did what I hesitate, what I hem and haw over. He showed us as his treasure by paying his very life so that we could have the kingdom of heaven. This payment shows that God loves you more than I do. God loves my family more than I do.

This kingdom of heaven that he has given us, this message of him having sold everything to take away our sins and gather us to him, this does what I could never do for my family. The kingdom of heaven fixes me inside, my soul. His message fixes me spiritually. My wife can't fix my soul. My kids can't fix my soul. Laws can't fix me. Governments can't fix me. Only God can fix me, and he does so by giving me this message, by giving me the kingdom of heaven.

And the kingdom of heaven fixes my soul not just for here and now but always and forever. It's not a temporary joy or a fleeting comfort. We have a finite time here on earth, but the kingdom of heaven gives us infinite blessings, a life with God that has no end. He did not hide this treasure in a field, hoping we might stumble across it nor did he put it in a glass display box that we can look at but can't touch like the merchant with his pearl of great price, that we can admire it, but we can't own it. God has put the kingdom of heaven, his message that he has sold of himself to purchase us from sin, death, and the devil, right in plain sight for us to have. His Word, the Bible, is the most readily accessible book in the entire world, with more copies printed than any other book, and translated into more languages than any other book. He wants us to have the kingdom of heaven. It is a wide net cast upon the whole world so that we can have this great treasure, a net cast for all generations before us and all generations yet to come, to gather us to him.

By giving us the kingdom of heaven, God has given my wife and kids what I could never give them. By his Word, he has given to them perfection right here and right now. He has adopted them into his family through the waters of baptism. He has given to them this gift of Holy Communion, that we can share a meal with God, a meal given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins. I could never give that to my family, but God did. He gave that treasure that I could never afford to them.

Thankfully, God has not pitted my family against him, to make me choose between him and them. Instead, God has used us to encourage one another to keep him as our most treasured possession. The kingdom of heaven has served as that net for our family, gathering us together to where we are constantly learning what God has done for us, and are realizing more and more that he is our greatest treasure, a treasure that we pray that we always value over everything else because no one else has done or could do what God has done for us. Everything in life is fleeting, except what God has done for us. That's his message that he has carefully preserved and given to us. That's the kingdom of heaven.

What else should we do with this great treasure other than value it for what it is? Share the wealth. If you understand what God has done for you, how he sold everything and gave up his very life so that you could have the kingdom of heaven, that you would know that you are forgiven, then be this teacher of God's Word, this disciple in the kingdom of heaven who is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old. (verse 52) The longer you have been a Christian, the more you've realized that you continue to learn more and more about our God. You have old treasures, truths that you have known since the beginning, truths confessed by the lips of little children that Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so. You have known since you became a Christian that Jesus died on the cross to take your sins away. And you will continue to bring these old treasures out every time you tell people about what God has done for you. But what new treasures will you bring out as well? Is there a new way that you treasure God – who he is and what he has done for you and what he continues to do for you? How will you share that new treasure with someone? Who do you know who needs to hear either the old treasures or the new ones that you have? When you bring out these treasures, the kingdom of heaven will be cast out there like that net and God will gather these people to himself.

God has made you the richest person on earth by giving you the kingdom of heaven. You know what he has done for you, how he sold everything, gave up his life, to fix your soul, to take away your sins, to make you perfect, both now and forevermore. Bring out these treasures, both old and new, to give people the treasure of God and what he has done for them. Amen.