

The Kingdom's Worth

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Preacher: Elliott Lytle

[0 : 0 0] Welcome, everybody. Hope you're doing well. My name is Elliot.! One of the pastors here at City Grace, so good to be with you. Like, as you're going to see today, these are really simple, short stories, but really deep as well, because the point of the parable is to reveal to you some aspect of God's kingdom and how it works.

And that's a really deep meaning to a really simple story. So this week, we're going to look at two short stories that really kind of give the same message. Jesus actually tells them back to back in the Gospel of Matthew.

And they're given to us to kind of help understand what his kingdom is worth. And so we're just going to jump right into those this morning. We find in Matthew chapter 13, verses 44 through 46, these two stories.

It says, The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure that is hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. And then in his joy, he goes and he sells all that he has, and he buys that field.

And again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had, and he bought it.

[1 : 3 8] This is God's word to us. So, two really simple and accessible stories, and I think even without a lot of historical context, we can understand these, right?

Like, we understand if you found, like, a treasure or, like, a safe that had some money in it, you would know there's value to that. Even today, if you found a pearl, a string of pearls, you would know you had something valuable.

But it would be fair to say these two stories would have been especially familiar to the hearers in Jesus' day because they represented things that might actually happen, right?

So, obviously, you know, in Jesus' time, there wasn't some robust international system of banking that was widely available to all people, nor was there some stock market where you could go invest your money in it, which means if you had some treasure, it might be perfectly reasonable course of action to just hide it, like stash it away somewhere where people can't get to it, right?

It's sort of that mason jar investing, right? Like, I'm going to put it in a mattress, and it's safe there, and I know no one can get to it. And you don't have to imagine too hard to think that actually finding buried treasure back then might be more of a realistic goal than it is now because, you know, you would have people bury something in a plot of land that they owned, and then over the course of the years, maybe an unexpected illness hits the land.

[3 : 0 4] Maybe there's a war, and that land changes hands. And for whatever cause, that treasure has long ago been forgotten and just lays undiscovered in that field until someone runs across it.

We also kind of know a little bit about valuable objects like gold and jewels and pearls, though I do think pearls are one of those things that hits a little bit different in the ancient world.

Like, we don't probably fuss about them as much as they used to. I mean, we still think of them as valuable, but back then, they could have been considered exceedingly valuable. There's actually a story, a well-known story by the Roman scholar Pliny the Elder, who was a contemporary of Cleopatra.

So he lived at the same time of Cleopatra, and he wrote a widely known story that noted Cleopatra had a pearl that was valued at what was said to be 25 million denarii, which if you extrapolate that out into our day, that's something north of a billion dollars for one pearl.

Now, we probably wouldn't value any pearl at a billion dollars today, but back then, the takeaway is that that pearl would have been worth whatever you could have given for it because it was one of a kind.

[4 : 20] And so, what we want to do today is examine what these two stories teach us about God's kingdom, about the value of it. Now, like we did last week, before we start, and you'll hear this a lot in this series, a quick side road.

It's important to point out, again, with parables, the way to approach them is not to try to dissect every piece of them as an example for how to live life.

Like, that's not the kind of teaching tool they are. Parables, again, extended metaphors, stories to reveal the kingdom. So, like, in this case, the purpose of this parable, you could tumble down some rabbit hole and try to make this a case study in business ethics.

And that's not really what it's here for. I mean, what I mean by that is, if in modern day you were going to look at purchasing a piece of property and you happened to come across some information where you knew that that piece of land was much more valuable than the owner knew it was worth, it's a perfectly valid ethical question to ask.

Should I, you know, apprise the owner of the value of it before I make an offer on it? Like, if some widow is selling her husband's, you know, prized antique car and she's selling it for \$3,000 because she doesn't know it's worth \$30,000, the right thing to do is probably not to take advantage of her ignorance, right?

[5 : 50] And so, like, these stories, again, aren't here to give you, like, life lessons on how to buy and sell with each other. It would be perfectly reasonable to think through as you're trying to make a deal what is right and fair.

But that being said, the key theme from both of these stories is really helpful for approaching what the value of God's kingdom is. And the first thing we see in both stories is that the person in the story has an epiphany about the value of something they found.

And that's really interesting because what it tells us is that not everyone recognizes the value of the kingdom. I'm sure many of you are familiar with kind of the popular TV genre in our culture of people bringing objects or items or antiques to pawn shops and road shows to sell them, right?

And, of course, the intrigue of the show is always, what is the thing really worth? Like, that's why it's interesting to watch. And, of course, in some instances, you have a person that is convinced, they have a rare and one-of-a-kind item only to have an expert show up and in, like, five seconds burst their bubble because they instantly recognize it as fake.

And then, of course, they go on to opine about why you can tell it's fake and that person's hearing none of it because they thought they had a million dollars and they got \$10, right? But on the other side of it, there are also those moments where people bring in items looking to get a certain price only to be told, you have something truly special here.

[7 : 28] So, like, they show up with some old painting that seems really cool and old and they want, like, \$100 for it. And as soon as the expert shows up, they're like, oh, oh, oh, okay, wow.

So, yeah, this is, like, the last work of Michelangelo and it's worth \$5 million. And oftentimes it's interesting, right, because the person that had it had no idea what the value of it was, right?

Like, they're like, hey, it's been sitting around in grandmother's closet for 20 years. You know, probably shouldn't let the cat scratch it up. My bad, you know. Like, they had no idea what the value of that thing was.

And so, because we see that not everybody sees the value of the kingdom, that tells us that recognizing the value of the kingdom is a gift from God.

In fact, I would go so far as to say it's an indication of the Holy Spirit working in someone's life when they start to see any kind of value in the things of God.

[8 : 30] Maybe more sharply, you won't care anything about Jesus or his people or the Bible or church until God starts to show you the value of it.

Now, it could be a gradual revelation. I heard a story that a preacher told years ago about someone he knew that actually their first exposure to the gospel was in a dorm room.

And so, they were kind of in the bunk bed and someone, another student, had come in to share the gospel with their roommate. And they weren't even really, like, they knew he was there, but they weren't even really paying attention to it.

And so, he was just kind of laying there overhearing this gospel presentation. He said, what was striking is that person recalled thinking they weren't ready to become a Christian. They really didn't even know if it was all true, but they firmly recalled thinking, I don't know if what that person said is true.

I'm not sure I buy it, but I wish it was true. I wish there was a God that cared about me like that. He was starting to see the value of the gospel.

[9 : 35] And indeed, you could go the next step and say, throughout Scripture, not recognizing the value of the kingdom is something that is kind of called out as something worth being condemned.

In the Old Testament, there's this story that I think kind of perfectly illustrates this, right? So, it's this story from antiquity where there are these two brothers, Jacob and Esau.

And Esau's the older one, which means in that culture, he has this really special privilege as the firstborn that gives him an extra inheritance. It gives him a special place of privilege in the family. But then in Genesis chapter 25, 29, we read about how he lost it. And it says, Once, when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted.

And Esau said to Jacob, Let me eat some of the red stew, for I'm exhausted. And therefore, his name was called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me your birthright now. And Esau said, Well, I am about to die of what use is a birthright to me?

[10 : 41] I mean, even through the centuries, you can see a little bit of, you know, drama king in that, right? I am about to die. I gotta have that soup. And so Jacob said, Well, swear to me now.

And so he swore to him, and he sold his birthright to Jacob. And then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew. And he ate, and he drank, and he rose, and he went his way.

And then the Bible says this, Thus, Esau despised his birthright. Esau gives away the special privilege and inheritance that belonged to him for a bowl of stew.

The Bible actually makes commentary on how bad this was later in the New Testament in the book of Hebrews. It says this, See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God and that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled, and that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau who sold his birthright for a single meal.

For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. In some translations, it actually says, Don't be like godless Esau.

[12 : 07] So in Hebrews, it's interesting because it uses this example of sexual immorality and by calling Esau godless to get across the point.

Now why does it do that? Because it is this image of giving up something of immense value for the fleeting and temporary pleasure of something that's gone in an instant.

It's that image of I will burn down my whole life for five minutes of sexual pleasure. I will give away the special privilege in my family for a bowl of stew because at that moment, I just felt like I had to have that or I was gonna die.

This actually shows up in Jesus' life as well. You may remember, he could do very few things in his hometown. So far as he went to say that a prophet has no honor in his hometown, which is crazy, right?

Because Jesus is doing these miracles and showing the kingdom to people, but he can't do it there because they cannot recognize the value of what is in front of them.

[13 : 20] There are real consequences to missing the value of the kingdom. But, there is a lofty invitation here as well.

Jesus is inviting us to recognize what that value is and that's because the kingdom actually invites us to give up our small ambitions.

You know, it's such a common story that it's cliché, but if you have children, you've probably seen a time where you went through a lot of trouble to get them a really expensive or special toy or special present that you were very excited about them having and lo and behold, they were much more excited about the wrapping paper than the present that you got them, right?

Like, there are all these presents around the Christmas tree and they spend all of Christmas morning playing with the house that they made out of the cardboard box that the things came in, right? And of course, you're left thinking, guess I should have just bought a 50 cent box because that's all they want.

And again, that's good and fine for kids, but it's also because they probably don't realize the value of what you had to go through to get it. And the Bible actually tells us that.

[14 : 35] You know, I think if, again, you were on the periphery of Christianity, you might have this mistaken impression that part of Christianity is you gotta shrink your desires, right?

Like, you need to be content with just a little bit less. You need to quit asking for a little bit more. But the Bible actually says, God doesn't find your desires too big.

He finds them too small. You are fussed about the wrong things. C.S. Lewis actually has this famous quote about this in his book, *The Weight of Glory*. He says, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak.

We are half-hearted creatures fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is laid before us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he simply cannot imagine what might be meant by the offer of a holiday by the sea.

We are far too easily pleased. You'll never do anything with God's kingdom until you recognize the value of it.

[15:44] But when you do, like, if God gives you that grace, the thing that these parables tell us is you then realize that you have to move with some urgency to get it.

I mean, think again about this man who found the treasure. He obviously wasn't a man of means. And how do we know that? Well, because the parable tells us that in order to buy the field, he had to liquidate everything he had.

He had to impoverish himself to buy it. I mean, think about what that would mean. That would mean like something that you found that was so worth everything that you were willing to take the risk of, I'm not going to have a house tomorrow.

I'm not going to have things tomorrow. I'm probably not going to have food tomorrow. I have to liquidate everything I have to go purchase this field. But it also says, he was happy to do it.

He went away with joy, not like, oh no. Like, he went away with joy. And how can that be? Like, how could he walk away from that with joy? Well, it's because when you understand the true value of the kingdom, the cost really doesn't matter anymore.

[16:58] The message of both of these parables is really clear. When the man understands the value of the treasure, he doesn't care if it costs everything he has because he knows what he has found is worth so much more.

It is a good trade. Same story with the pearl. When the pearl merchant realizes he's looking at Cleopatra's pearl, he's not thinking about, man, they've got a high price on this.

He's thinking there is no price they could put on this that is worth what it's worth. I gotta get it. I gotta sell everything I have. And that's interesting because in both stories, the person realizes this is an all-in affair.

the only way they're gonna get the treasure is to go all-in. Everything they've got their whole life. And that themes all throughout Scripture as well, like our anxiousness around what we need and what we might have to give up to be a part of God's kingdom, the remedy that God gives us in Scripture for this anxiousness, these worries we have, is an all-in pursuit of the kingdom.

[18:18] In Matthew 6, verse 33, it says, Jesus again speaking says, but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

That isn't a verse about methodology. That verse is not saying you're doing the process wrong.

Like, the meaning of it is not, make sure you do all your praying and your giving and your church stuff first, and then God will give you all the rest of the stuff that you really want.

That's not what Jesus is saying there. That verse, just like these parables, is about what you value, what you're obsessed with.

Maybe another way to say it is, you can never, you will never possess the kingdom until it possesses you first. It's that kind of, what do I value?

What is the thing I am most resolved to give my life to? Because once you see it, once you know what it's worth, you would really say, this thing that I have found is worth any price.

[19:31] It's worth any price. So a good question would be, what is the price? Well, it's kind of crazy because when you look in scripture, what you find is, the kingdom is a free gift with the highest of cost.

Say that again because it seems to contradict itself. The kingdom is a free gift with the highest of cost. the parable teaches us that God's kingdom is worth whatever you would need to pay for it.

But interestingly, there's this actually subtle message in this parable and not so subtle in other parables that we're going to read that is kind of conveying the message that you can't really buy it.

Again, remember, the purpose of the parable isn't about can you scrape together the cost, it's what do you value, right? Because the truth of the kingdom is, there's no way you can give enough to get

it.

Like, scripture is really clear, you can't buy your way into the kingdom with money. You can't buy your way in with good works. You can't buy it with wisdom or knowledge.

[20 : 43] Like, scripture is really clear, you cannot do anything to merit this kingdom. You can only access that kingdom through Jesus. and he gives that as a free gift.

Entrance in the kingdom is free because of what Jesus has done. So what's the message then?

Like, if I can't ever do anything to merit the kingdom and it's only open to me by Jesus, then kind of how do I resolve what this parable is trying to teach me?

And again, I think the key is specifically in what had to be given up. Again, back to the parables. In both instances, it says, the person gave all that they had.

They emptied themselves. They literally had to give away their life to enter into the life in the kingdom. And that's exactly what Jesus tells us in Matthew 16.

He says, Jesus told his disciples, if anyone is going to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for my sake will find it.

[22 : 05] You can't do anything to merit the kingdom, but to live in the reality of it, you have to give up everything. You have to die to yourself.

The pastor Tim Keller was often fond of saying that Christianity isn't some change in dimension or degree.

It is a fundamental change in reality. It is not an invitation to become a little more religious or a little bit kinder or a little bit more generous to kind of make some tweaks to yourself.

It is a path that requires unconditional surrender that leads to unimaginable splendor and there is nothing in between.

He would also often note that how as modern people, frankly, we don't like this, right? Like we don't like the sharpness of that. We like degrees of how in or how out we can be.

[23 : 04] Like we want to be able to like experience a little bit of the kingdom with this foot over here, but also kind of keep a foot planted in the world, planted in things I feel like I can trust in, but the Bible says you can't do that.

Jesus is king or he's not. God is your God or something else is. Entry, and there's just, there's no way to do this kind of one foot in or one foot out.

And I understand, again, that can be easy to confuse because it's not about merit. Like entry into that kingdom requires perfect righteousness, which you had no shot at and Jesus is secured and he gives it as a free gift.

Maybe another way to say it is the door to the kingdom is open. There is nothing in Jesus, when you step into him, there is nothing to prevent you from getting the kingdom.

The door has been made open, but to experience it, to step into that flow of life, that reality where God's kingdom has come and God's will is being done, you get that when Jesus is king and you are dead to yourself.

[24 : 15] And when you step out of it, when you walk in sin, in your own power, where you're your own God, you experience a different kind of life.

You step out of the flow of the kingdom. In John 3.3, Jesus actually described the kind of life we're talking about as being born again.

again. It's where that phrase in Christendom comes from. And we actually model this every time we do a baptism, right? Like it's an image of I am dying to something.

I am dying to an old self and an old kingdom, but I'm also being born to something. I'm being born into a new life and a new kingdom.

And just like this passage we just read in Matthew 16, it says I'm both losing a life, but I'm finding a different one. And that's what Jesus is trying to show you about the kingdom.

[25 : 13] And again, probably why he uses parables because it's not just some system. It is a different reality that he's trying to show you how you step into.

And so very simply, I think as we kind of come to the conclusion here, I think that just leaves us with one really pointed question for everyone in the room today.

do you see the value of the kingdom? If someone were to ask you what is the most valuable thing you could get, what would you answer?

Can you see it in a way that whatever God asks you to give up, you would say worth it? And if not, do you want it?

Do you want it? As the band comes up today, a couple of ways you can respond to Jesus' invitation. So if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus, I think that the invitation that Jesus gives to each of us, again, it isn't one of self-renovation.

[26 : 26] He's not offering for you to step into a life that's a little more disciplined and a little nicer so you can feel better about yourself. What He is offering, and I understand it may sound like you might think that, I don't think that's possible, but the invitation is to really, into a different kind of life, to say, you can live in a reality, in a kingdom where goodness and healing and justice and mercy and abundance, all of the things that we lament don't seem to be in abundance in our world.

He says, you can live in that kingdom right now. There is a way of life that's like that. And if that's not how you see being a Christian, then I'd invite you to ask God for that.

Say, God, help me to see if that's true. I don't know if it's true, but I wish it was. Help me to see it.

We'd love to talk to you about that. If you are a follower of Jesus, what a gift we have been given to know that there is an eternal kingdom and an eternal king.

And what a gift that you can step into that day by day whenever you like. Maybe today before we take communion it's just a good time to cry out for God to, you know, I find a lot of times it helps to be specific, right?

Like you should ask God's kingdom to break out in a specific area of your life, right? Like you know what that thing is, that thing where you know there's not peace and there's not abundance and his kingdom isn't coming.

[28 : 11] That's the place to pray. God, I want to see your reality there. And that place could just be you. It could be the part of you that you know you can't fix. Father, your kingdom come, your will be done right now here.

After that, if you're a believer, you're, we go to the communion table and it's interesting because, you know, that phrase has a double meaning, right?

Again, the kingdom is a free gift with the highest of cost. There was a cost to open that door. Jesus is not exempt from laying his life down.

You know, what's so, what just continues to be overwhelming about that is, think about this, Jesus did that because he had a vision of the kingdom.

Just like he's asking you to like see the value of it, but think about this. The vision of the kingdom that Jesus had was one with you in it.

[29 : 20] That was the value he saw. He went to the cross, not because he didn't know what splendor and glory was. He is God and he has existed in that glory in a way we don't understand forever, but he said, the kingdom that I value is the one where my people are in it.

He wants so badly for us to live that life and when you take communion it's just a, it's a moment to remember he laid down his life because he knew what it was worth.

We can do the same. Father, we give you this moment. Holy Spirit, come and do whatever pleases you. Give us the grace to see the kingdom today through the dim veil of this world and all of the things that scream at us that that is not how it is.

Jesus, may the beauty of your kingdom be a better and louder word in this place of worship today.

Come and be with us, Father, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.