

The Supreme Value of Knowing Jesus

Matthew 13:44–46

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The Parables of Matthew 13

We continue our study of the Gospel of Matthew. Today’s passage is only three verses long — Matthew 13:44–46 — but those three verses contain two of the most searching parables Jesus ever told.

Matthew 13 is a collection of parables, and Jesus tells us plainly in verse 13 why he speaks this way: people are blind and deaf to the kingdom. He does not speak in parables *to make* people blind and deaf, but rather to help the spiritually blind and deaf see and hear. The parables are not designed to confuse or to conceal. They do the opposite — they reveal to all of us the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, the things previously unknown, brought into the light through story and image.

Matthew 13:34 tells us that “he said nothing to them without a parable.” To my mind, this means that the parables gathered here are not one-time illustrations but the everyday teaching currency of Jesus — the stories he returned to again and again because they were the best available language for what he was trying to show us.

When I speak of the Kingdom of God — or, as Matthew consistently renders it, the Kingdom of Heaven — I understand that phrase to be all-inclusive: who God is, his will, his purposes, and his rule; the nature and identity of Jesus as Messiah and King; and the gospel itself, the good news of what Jesus has done for us. All of these things are caught up in that single phrase — the heavenly realities shown to us through earthly terms.

So when I come to a parable, the question I always bring with me is this: *What does this parable reveal to us about God’s mystery? What heavenly thing is it showing me through this earthly picture?*

Consider the parables that have come before in this chapter. In the parable of the four soils, what is revealed is how the Lord — the sower — throws the seed, the word of the Kingdom, everywhere, without discrimination. And what is also revealed is that the hearts of people, represented by the different soils, often fail to receive it: hardness, distraction, and fear all conspire against it. In the parables that followed, the central mystery on display has been the nature of God’s grace. In the parable of the weeds, grace preserves and protects. In the parable

of the mustard seed, grace empowers, turning weakness into glory. In the parable of the leaven, grace is patient, perfecting what God has started over time and in hiddenness.

Now we come to two more parables told in just three verses: the parable of the hidden treasure and the parable of the pearl of great worth.

Behold the Treasure

The theme before us this morning is, I believe, the most important theme a preacher could ever address. It is this: the supreme value and worth of knowing Jesus — a value so high and so great that it transforms a person’s entire relationship to this world and everything in it.

Before turning to the text, I want to let a few voices speak. These are words from Christian writers I have carried with me into this passage, and they serve as a kind of tuning fork for what we are about to hear.

Jonathan Edwards wrote, “The enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied.” Augustine, centuries earlier, said, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” John Piper has put it this way: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.” Charles Spurgeon: “I have a great need for Christ; I have a great Christ for my need.” And John Owen: “The more I see of the glory of Christ, the more the painted beauties of this world will wither in my eyes.”

And then there is the Psalmist, speaking for them all:

“Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.” — *Psalm 73:25 ESV*

Psalm 73 is one of my favorites, and one I have taught many times. It is the psalm of a man who nearly lost his faith — not because he stopped believing in God, but because he became consumed with envy. The arrogant and wicked seemed to have better lives than those who, like him, actually tried to live according to God’s ways. He nearly cursed God over it. But then he entered the sanctuary. He drew near to God in worship. And in that moment, everything shifted — because he realized that he possessed the one thing his enemies did not, and that one thing made all the difference. *He had God.* And because he had God, the things of earth grew strangely dim. “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.”

Our two parables today carry that same freight. They reveal the supreme value and worth of Jesus, and the transformed life of the one who truly knows him.

Matthew 13:44–46

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 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 bought it.” — Matthew 13:44–46 ESV

The Man and the Hidden Treasure

The first parable is about a man who discovers a treasure buried in a field. We are not told how he found it — only that one day, unexpectedly, he comes upon it. He immediately recognizes what it is, and he recognizes something else just as quickly: no one else knows it is there. So he covers it back up and begins the process of acquiring it.

The law of the ancient world, as this parable implies, was straightforward: he who owns the land owns what is on the land. To legally possess the treasure, the man must own the field. But there is a problem — he does not have the funds. To raise those funds, he will have to sell everything he owns. And that is precisely what he does.

Notice what the Scripture says: *then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has*. Pay close attention to when the joy begins. It does not begin after the transaction is complete, after the deed is signed and the treasure is in his hands. The joy is already present in the selling. The future hope of possessing that treasure fills him with gladness in the present, even as he is parting with everything he owns.

I picture this man set up along the road with all of his belongings spread out before him — lawnmowers and bicycles, kitchen appliances, furniture, even his car — and he has a wide grin on his face. He is practically celebrating every sale. When someone asks him, “Why are you so happy about selling everything you have?” he tries to contain himself. “Oh, nothing — just scaling down.” He cannot let on. He does not want anyone else to figure out what he is sitting on. But the joy is irrepressible, because he already knows what is waiting for him on the other side of this sacrifice.

And when at last he has gathered enough to purchase the field — when the treasure is finally, legally, irrevocably his — every hardship, every loss, every worry simply vanishes. They are swallowed up by the supreme worth of what he now possesses.

This, Jesus says, is what the Kingdom of Heaven is like.

Before we go further, it is important to be clear about something: parables are not allegories. An allegory assigns spiritual meaning to every detail of a story. If we read this parable that way, we will end up with some genuinely harmful theology. Some have interpreted this man's selling of his possessions as a symbol of the works one must perform to earn salvation — as though the treasure must be purchased through human effort. That is wrong. Our salvation is given freely and received by faith, not by works. Others have looked at the man hiding the treasure back in the field and concluded that the parable endorses keeping one's faith secret when convenient. That too is wrong. Jesus says plainly, "Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32 ESV).

The parable has one point, and that point is the supreme worth and value of Jesus — who he is, what he has done, and what he continues to do for us.

That treasure encompasses the full wealth of the gospel: the forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven; the righteousness of Christ credited to our account; adoption into God's family with full rights of inheritance; the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us; reconciliation to the Father; every promise of God finding its yes and amen in Christ; eternal life that begins now and stretches into forever; transformation into the likeness of Jesus; and a hope that cannot be shaken by anything this world throws at us. All of this is the treasure. All of this is what the Kingdom of Heaven means.

And what the parable teaches — seen in this man selling everything he owns with a smile on his face — is that when you truly know Jesus, your relationship to everything else in this world changes. The things of this world lose the power they once had over you. Hardship and suffering no longer feel hopeless. Worldly status, reputation, and the approval of others lose their grip on your heart, because you already have the approval of the One who matters most. The fear of loss diminishes, because you cannot lose what truly matters — Christ and his kingdom. Material wealth becomes a tool for kingdom purposes rather than an idol to be served. You find yourself able to be generous, to sacrifice, to hold the things of this world loosely — not through gritted teeth, but with genuine freedom — because you are gripped by someone infinitely more valuable.

It is because of this treasure that we, as the Scriptures say, rejoice in suffering (Romans 5:3–5; James 1:2–4; 1 Peter 1:6–7), give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18; Ephesians 5:20), are strongest precisely when we are weakest (2 Corinthians 12:9–10), and are counted blessed even when we are persecuted (Matthew 5:10–12; 1 Peter 4:14). These are not heroic achievements of the human will. They are the natural fruit of having found the treasure.

The Merchant and the Pearl

The second parable makes the same essential point, but from a different angle.

“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 bought it.” —
Matthew 13:45–46 ESV

Once again, the point is the supreme value and worth of knowing Jesus — and the way that value, when it is truly grasped, rightly reorders everything else. When Christ is known, the value of the things of this world becomes properly aligned. And by properly aligned I mean this: we no longer love things more than they deserve to be loved, or less than they should be. Recognizing and living in the supreme worth of Christ leads to a right hierarchy of loves — loving what God loves, in the order that God loves it. People above possessions. Eternal realities above temporal ones. Faithfulness to God above worldly success or acclaim. Holiness above popularity. Service above status. God’s glory above personal ambition or praise. This is the life of someone who has found the pearl.

But there is a difference between these two parables worth pausing over. The man who finds the treasure in the field does so entirely unexpectedly — he was not looking for it. The merchant, by contrast, has spent his entire professional life in search of fine pearls. He is an expert. He knows what he is looking for.

The man who stumbles upon the treasure in the field is like those who come to Christ late in life. He has walked a long road. He has seen a lot of fields and chased a lot of false treasures — things that promised joy but could not deliver it: success, pleasure, comfort, the approval of others, money, control. But then, unexpectedly, through the sovereign grace of God, he stumbles upon Christ. And in that moment, everything changes. The joy of discovering Christ late in life is profound precisely because he knows what he has been rescued from. He has pursued every worldly treasure and found them all bankrupt. His joy is not diminished by the years he spent looking elsewhere — it is amplified by the mercy that found him when he was not even looking.

The pearl merchant is different. He is like those who are born and raised in the church. People who grow up in church know a great deal about pearls. From childhood, they have been immersed in church culture — they know the songs by heart, have memorized dozens of Scripture passages, attended every vacation Bible school and church camp, and can articulate sound theology with ease. Their pouch is full of religious knowledge and Christian activity. They can explain the gospel, serve on committees, and present every outward mark of faithful Christianity. But for many, it has been more about maintaining a tradition, pleasing parents, or fulfilling expectations than about knowing the living God. And then one day, something happens. Perhaps through a crisis, a moment of brokenness, or simply the quiet, persistent work of the Holy Spirit, they encounter the resurrected Lord in a way they never have before.

What was once religion becomes relationship — a living, breathing, transformative connection with Jesus that makes all those pearls they have been collecting seem worthless compared to this one pearl of great price. The songs they have sung a thousand times now bring tears. The Scriptures they memorized come alive with meaning. They realize they had been holding a collection of beautiful things *about* God, when what they really needed was God himself.

The field-finder stumbles into grace. The pearl merchant discovers that what he has been searching for was there all along. Which one is you?

Or perhaps neither of these describes you. Perhaps you are here this morning still searching — still wondering whether this treasure is real or just another empty promise. You have seen religion, perhaps you have even seen religious people, but you have not yet seen Christ in a way that has made you willing to stake your life on him. If that is where you are, I am glad you are here, and I am glad you are still asking. Jesus promised: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7–8 ESV). The treasure is not as hidden as you may think. By God’s grace, those who seek him find him. Keep asking. Keep seeking.

Whether you found Christ unexpectedly, discovered him after a lifetime of religious activity, or are still searching — the point remains the same: he is the treasure worth everything.

Application: Behold the Treasure

I struggled with how to apply these parables. My first instinct was to offer some kind of spiritual value audit — a series of diagnostic questions about your time, your money, and your priorities to help you identify your own hierarchy of loves. But on reflection, I think that approach would miss the entire point of what Jesus is doing here.

The point of these parables is *not* what you must do to obtain the treasure or purchase the pearl. These parables are not, at their heart, about the cost of discipleship. They are about the supreme worth and value of Jesus Christ — a worth so great that the selling is done with joy, that the cost of discipleship is simply swallowed up by what one gains in him. That is the point.

To be clear: there *is* a cost to discipleship. Jesus says plainly in Matthew 16:24, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” But here is the key — the cost of discipleship is a *response* to finding the treasure, not the means of obtaining it. And when you have found the treasure, when you possess the pearl of great worth, dying to self is not as terrifying or as strange as it sounds. The joy has already begun.

So my application is simply this: *behold the treasure*.

How do you do that? Here is my suggestion. Just as the Psalmist in Psalm 73 drew near to God and found his perspective transformed, spend some intentional time in God's presence this week. Take ten minutes each day to read through one of the Gospels, and as you read, ask God to show you the beauty of Christ. Do not begin by asking for the strength to sell — begin by asking for the sight to *see*. Ask God to open your eyes to Christ as he really is: all-sufficient, all-beautiful, and better than everything you have been chasing. Because when the treasure is truly seen, the heart begins to loosen its grip on lesser loves — not through guilt, not through a list of spiritual disciplines performed under obligation, but through joy.

Pray this: *Lord, open my eyes. I want to behold your beauty.* For when Christ is the treasure, everything else finds its proper place.

Prayer

Gracious Father, we come to You now and confess that our eyes are often dull and our hearts are easily distracted. We have chased lesser treasures — things that cannot satisfy, things that cannot save — and yet You have been near, calling us, offering Yourself. Forgive us for loving Your gifts more than we love You, and for trying to fill the hunger of our souls with what was never meant to bear that weight.

Open our eyes, Lord. Let the Spirit take the truths we already know and make them living and real — so that Christ is not merely familiar, but precious; not merely studied, but desired; not merely admired, but trusted.

Where our hearts are tangled in fear, loosen its grip. Where we are clinging to comfort, reputation, control, or possessions, free us — not by shame, but by a greater joy.

Replace our restless striving with the quiet contentment of knowing we are Yours. Be our portion, our pearl, our treasure. Reorder our loves. Align our values. Teach us to hold the world loosely and to hold Christ tightly. And let the joy begin even now — in the turning, in the surrender, in the trusting — because You are worth it.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.