

“The joy of the Gospel.” (4)

I heard a story about a man who whispered, "God, speak to me" and a nightingale sang. But, the man did not hear. So the man yelled, "God, speak to me" and the thunder rolled across the sky. But, the man did not listen. The man looked around and said, "God, let me see you." And a star shined brightly. But the man did not see. And, the man shouted, "God, show me a miracle." And a life was born. But the man did not notice. So the man cried out in despair, "Touch me God, and let me know you are here." And so God reached down and touched the man. But the man brushed the butterfly away and walked on.

And the point of the story is that God sends us little reminders of Himself to us all the time but people just don't want to stop to listen and notice. We are going to look at two parables today, the parable of the hidden treasure and the parable of the pearl. And so you are going to get two sermons today but don't worry they won't last twice as long.

Jesus has just finished telling the parable about the weeds in the field and our dear disciples still haven't understood what Jesus meant and so Jesus explains the parable to His disciples. And so what Jesus is trying to do is explain what the kingdom of heaven is like. And it's in **Matthew 13:44-46** we find the parable of the hidden treasure and the pearl.

Let's look at the hidden treasure first and see if we can understand what Jesus is trying to explain to His disciples and see if we can find out what treasures are to be found in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus says in **Matthew 13:44** "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".

Now unlike the world we live in today where we have banks and building societies, the people of Jesus' day didn't have these facilities. The safest place to keep your valuables in Biblical times was buried in the ground.

And we know of a couple of examples of that happening don't we? Do you remember in **The Book of Joshua** when **Achan stole some valuables from the Lord**? Achan says in **Joshua 7:21**, "When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath." Another example would be the unprofitable servant, which Jesus spoke about in **Matthew 25:25** and the servant said, "I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground."

But the point is that many people would bury their treasures under the ground, especially if they knew that war was on its way. Now we all know that Palestine is steeped in history, especially when it comes to wars. And as usual Jesus teaches a parable about something that was very relevant to those who were listening. It was common practice for people to bury their treasure in the ground until the war was over and then they would return to find it again when there was peace in the land.

And like we already know about any parable of Jesus, we shouldn't make every little detail mean something. In this little parable there are **two main points** that Jesus is stressing. **1. The joy of this man's discovery.**

This man who was going about his daily business, doing his work when he found the treasure. It wasn't so much by accident, ok, he stumbled across it but he was working diligently in the field. And I say diligently because this treasure would have been buried deep in the ground. He wouldn't just be scrapping the surface of the ground in his day's work; he would have been digging deep into the ground.

And it's while he's digging deep that he discovers the hidden treasure. And its then that he hides it again and goes on his way. Now the treasure is the gospel, the word of God itself and its called treasure because sometimes it takes a little effort to find it. **Isaiah 33:6** "He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure."

We're not talking about a physical treasure here that this man found, we're talking about a spiritual treasure. We're talking about salvation, wisdom and knowledge. We're talking about fearing the Lord Himself. **But where can this treasure be found today?** Well, the good news is that you don't have to go to Palestine to find the gospel of Christ today.

The sad news is that many people still think the only place to find and share and talk about the gospel is in our church buildings. That's just being a part time Christian, that's the wrong attitude. **Philippians 2:5** "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

People should be able to see the Gospel in our everyday lives. Even when we suffer as Christians, people should see the Gospel in our suffering. **1 Peter 2:21** "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

A little boy came in from playing in the garden one day covered in dirt and asked his mother, "Who am I?" Ready to play the game she said, "I don't know! Who are you?" "WOW!" cried the child. "Mrs. Johnson was right! She said I was so dirty, my own mother wouldn't recognize me!"

Loved ones people need to recognise us as Christians and see Jesus living and active in our lives. We need to get away from this idea that people can only be reached with the Gospel in a religious atmosphere through the preaching of the Gospel. The Gospel can be found at your work. The Gospel can be found in the office, in the classroom by your friends. The Gospel can be found anywhere by people who see the life of Jesus in our lives.

**2. What's the gospel worth?** You see this man was willing to give up everything to make the treasure his own.

And it wasn't even an effort for him to give up everything, he was happy doing it, the text says in **Matthew 13:44**, "When the man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field." This treasure gave him so much joy that he was even willing to sacrifice everything he had to attain it. He wanted salvation so much you couldn't put a price on it.

Do you remember when you became a Christian? Do you remember when you received the forgiveness of your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit? You knew that your salvation was sure as long as you stayed faithful. I remember that day well; I went up to my friend's mother and said, "I have good news." And she said, "By the look of the smile on your face, I would say that you have won the lottery." But when I said, "That I found forgiveness for every single sinful act I had ever done in my life," she wasn't all that impressed.

My point is this, like the rest of the world; my friend's mother thought that money was the only thing that could give me lasting joy. But as we know it's only our salvation that brings lasting joy. **Isaiah 12:1-6** "In that day you will say: 'I will praise you, O Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.' With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. In that day you will say: 'Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you.'"

Do you remember that day when you were baptised into Christ? How you wanted to tell the world about what you had discovered in Christ? Your discovery was worth giving everything else up for. That was the day you stopped drinking heavily and stopped telling rude jokes. That was the day you gave up playing the lottery because you discovered something that could make you eternally happy. But sadly not everyone is willing to even try and give up even their most treasured possessions.

Let me tell you a story about a man who was very wealthy and he wanted to inherit eternal life. Now he knew the Ten Commandments and he stuck to them ever since he was a young boy. And he was told that he could get eternal life if he just gave up one thing, all his possessions. But the man became very sad when he was told this.

Now you've probably guessed I was speaking about the **rich young ruler** who was speaking to Jesus in **Luke 18:18-30**. And the Bible says in **Luke 18:24+25** "Jesus looked at him and said, 'How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'"

Oh, he was willing to pay lip service to God but he wasn't willing to sacrifice anything to be a true follower of God. His most treasured possession was his wealth, **what's yours?** Maybe it's your ambition to get that promotion at work. Maybe your most treasured possession is your car. Maybe your most treasured possession is your sinful lifestyle.

You see it's not easy becoming a Christian and it doesn't get any easier when you are a Christian, especially when you have to sacrifice things that are so dear to you. Paul says in **Philippians 3:4-6** "If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless."

He says, "I was circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, I wasn't some Johnny come lately to the Jewish religion, I was of the stock of Israel, I was of the elite tribe of Benjamin, my parents were Hebrews, I spoke the Hebrew language in a day where most of you don't even know it."

He says, "Check me out, I was a Pharisee, he says there was only 6000 allowed in that club and I was one of them."

He says, "Not only that but according to my zeal, I loved Judaism so much I travelled all over the world to kill people who opposed it, and check out my legalistic righteousness, try to find one thing I was doing wrong in the law of Moses."

And so Paul says, "Let me tell you something about sacrifice, I gave up my religion because that was my most treasured possession."

And following on in **Philippians 3:7-9** he says, "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, 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--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

Paul says he had to give up a brilliant future within Judaism. And he says that when you discover the treasure of Christ and His word and compare them to all things that you chase after in this world, he says you'll discover that it's all just rubbish compared to knowing Christ.

When are we going to realise that all that physical stuff that we hold so dearly to our hearts is just rubbish? Jesus says in **Matthew 6:21** "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Is your heart set on running your business well or is it set in the word of God? Is your heart set on continuing in your habit, whether it is drugs or gambling, or is it set on getting to heaven?

Loved ones the Gospel can be found in many places, especially in the hearts of the Christians sitting around you. That man gave up everything he had to get that salvation and that's because there is a price to pay for being a Christian. Jesus said in **Matthew 16:24**, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me". A disciplined life is never easy, but the joy that you receive in return from doing God's will far outweighs the sacrifices you need to make.

Let's go ahead and read the 2<sup>nd</sup> parable, the parable of the pearl. Jesus says in **Matthew 13:45+46** "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

Historians tell us that in the ancient world pearls had a very special place in men's hearts. People from all over the world desired to possess a lovely pearl, not only for its monetary value but also because of its beauty. Unlike many people today, back then people would take time and find pleasure simply by handling it and thinking about it. They found a certain joy in simply possessing and looking at a pearl.

And the historian writers tell us that the main sources of these pearls were found around the shores of the Red Sea and around the coast of Britain. But they said that these merchants who went looking for these pearls would travel all over the world to find one pearl which was more beautiful than all the others they had seen.

But why would Jesus say that the kingdom of heaven is like a pearl? I heard a story about a man who was stopped by a police officer for driving without any break lights. The driver was visibly distressed so the officer said to him, "Don't take it so hard, it's only a minor offence." The troubled driver replied, "That's not the point, what worries me is, what's happened to my trailer and my wife?"

And the point is that there are only few things more important than our families in this life and our salvation is one of them. You see just like the man who found the hidden treasure, they both found something that was beyond value. They both found the means to eternal life and just like the other guy; he too sold everything he had just to get it.

After all what price can you put on your salvation? How much is your soul worth to God? Romans 5:6-8 “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Paul is saying, “Listen, your soul is so precious to Jesus Christ that He was willing to die for you.” Even when you were powerless, even when you didn’t want to know anything about God, Christ died for you anyway. It cost God the price of His precious One and only Son, to make your salvation possible. That’s how much your soul is worth to God.

You know a lot of people when they find something precious, the first thing they want to do is sell it on. But the question is how much do you value your soul? Is it worth selling on? Judas Iscariot turned his back on Jesus and sold his soul to Jewish authorities for 30 pieces of silver. And sometimes we look at Judas and wonder how he could ever do that.

But the truth of the matter is, each and every one of us turn our backs on Jesus and sell our souls out to Satan for less than 30 pieces of silver sometimes. Every time you turn on the satellite TV and watch pornography because you think nobody knows, you’ve just turned your back on Jesus and sold your soul out to the devil. Every time you talk gossip to someone about a fellow Christian, you’ve just turned your back on Jesus and sold your soul out to Satan. Every time you use foul language when you’re watching a football game, you’ve just turned your back on Jesus and sold out your soul to Satan. Your soul means everything to God, and your salvation should mean everything to you.

Jesus also tells us that the pearl is like the kingdom of heaven because it’s the most beautiful thing you could ever possess. I heard a story about a woman whose late husband was a clergyman. She said they would always go to their local restaurant for Sunday lunch and they would always order the fish. She said that on one occasion they ordered their food and realised that the waitress behind the counter had forgotten their name. The waitress shouted through to the cook, “It’s Mr and Mrs Vicar, they want two soles saved.”

And that’s what Jesus is telling us here, that a soul saved is the most precious and beautiful thing we will ever see and witness. Jesus says in Luke 15:8-10 “Suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

And it’s through being obedient to the Gospel and continuing to do God’s will, that we see the beauty of a godly life. John 14:21 “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

It’s not enough to know that something is valuable and beautiful. You need to know and then take hold of it and then live your life by it, and then you will discover how precious your salvation is to you. Too many people talk about the 5 steps to salvation, hearing, believing, repenting, confession and baptism. Well, there is a 6<sup>th</sup> step loved ones and Jesus tells us in Matthew 25:23 that it’s faithfulness.

The 6<sup>th</sup> step is not just a step; it’s a continuous walk. It’s using the talents that God has given us and staying faithful until Jesus returns. Do you want to show your appreciation to God for the Gospel? Find out what God wants you to do and then do what God wants you to do. James 2:26 “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

Now we need to understand that there are other pearls we can find in life. There are many other things that people can find such as a good job and a nice home. People can find pearls in knowledge and in art or even in serving other people.

It can be found in friendships and relationships. These are all lovely and beautiful pearls of life but the supreme and most precious pearl lies in seeking to do God’s will.

Jesus says in **Matthew 6:33** “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Now doing God’s will doesn’t put down these other pearls but living your life in accordance with the will of God is the most precious and valuable thing you can possess. The man who found the hidden treasure in a field stumbled upon God’s will, while he was working. But these sea merchants would deliberately travel all over the world to find a special pearl.

He found his deliberately. He spent his whole life looking and searching for this gem of a pearl. He searched everywhere until he found what he was looking for and he did that because he knew exactly what he was looking for. And no doubt he saw many pearls on his travels and he would have stopped and admired some of them because of their beauty.

But how did he know which pearl was the most precious pearl? I remember hearing a story about a man who used to preach on the streets of London and a man came up to him and said, “You know, there are hundreds of religions in the world and everyone says they have the truth, how are we supposed to know what’s right?” And the man said, “Did I hear you say there are hundreds of religions, I thought there are only 2? “Now granted there are different variations, but there are only 2 in the world.” The man said, “What do you mean?” He said, “Well, there is one, of all the religions of the world based on what you have to do, and there is only one religion in the world that’s based on what God has done.”

And the point is many religious groups claim they have the truth but as someone once said to me, “Someone’s telling lies.” Now I’m sure there are some pearls to be found within most religious groups but how do you know that the pearl you possess is the right pearl?

Well a good start would be to be like the people that Paul talked too about Christ in **Acts 17:11** “The Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”

You should never go to any church and just sit there and accept what the preacher or teacher is telling you is truth. Go home with that same great eagerness and examine the scriptures for yourself to see if what the preacher has told you was true or not. **2 Timothy 2:15** “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

You can’t blame the preacher on Judgement Day for ending up in the wrong place because you found the wrong pearl, you can only blame yourself. Let me finish by saying this, one of the reasons Jesus talked to people in parables was because He wanted to search people’s hearts. He wanted to know who was interested in the truth and who wasn’t.

If you’re not a Christian today you need to ask yourself a serious question. When you see or hear the Gospel according to Christ being preached, whether it’s from a pulpit or from your neighbour’s lives. What are you going to do with it? Are you going to look for a treasure that suits your needs or are you going to do what God asks of you? Are you going to settle for a pearl, which is a watered down version of the truth, or are you going to dig deep and continue your search for the real truth?

Jesus says in **John 14:6** “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” You see the Bible is our authority and the Bible has the last word in our lives. Everything we do and say, preach and teach should always be Bible based. Or as Paul would say in **Galatians 1:10** “Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

And if the Bible doesn’t have the last say, then be careful you’re not among a group of people who just want to please men. Maybe this morning you’ve lost your joy as a Christian in serving the Lord. Well today would be a good day to tell someone that you’re struggling as a Christian and they can pray with you.

Today would be a good day to step out in faith and grab that treasure and make that pearl your own and start your walk as a child of God, holding onto the salvation that is promised to all who are faithful to Him.

The question is what is your salvation worth?