

## Week 5 – The Treasure and the Pearl – Matthew 13:44-46

### Scripture Reading: Proverbs 2:1-8

#### Introduction

In February 2013, a northern California couple was walking their dog in their backyard.

While they were casually walking around they spotted something in the moss under the shadow of an old tree.

A closer inspection revealed it to be the edge of a rusty can and as they were digging it out they uncovered other cans, six in total containing a hoard of 1,427 gold coins in \$5, \$10, and \$20 US denominations adding up to a face value of \$31,000. All the coins were dated from 1847-94.

According to experts, most of the coins found in the can were in uncirculated, mint condition and some of them were so rare that they fetched more than a million dollars apiece.

The net worth of the coins is estimated to be around \$11 million.

Most of us have fantasized at one time or another about finding treasure and stories like that one keep us thinking that just maybe it might happen for us too

Or how about this example:

In 1992, farmer Peter Whatling lost his hammer in a field where he had been working so he called his friend Eric Lawes who owned a metal detector to help him find it

Before finding the hammer though, they found a small oak chest that contained a collection of silver spoons, gold jewelry, and coins all dating back to the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century AD

Mr. Whatling and Mr. Lawes knew they were on to something big so they called in help and archeologists managed to find all sorts of other treasures buried in the same field including Roman ladles and serving bowls

The British Museum bought what is now known as the **Hoxne Hoard** even though they had to borrow money to do so  
Oh, the hammer was ultimately found as well and is also on display in the museum

The value of the find was estimated to be just shy of \$4.5 million in today's dollars

Both of our parables this week concern found treasure and how it relates to the kingdom of heaven

So far in our series on the parables we have seen:

Different ways that the message of the kingdom would be received in the parable of **the Soils**

The efforts of Satan to corrupt the character of the kingdom and how God will ultimately sort things out in the parable of **the Weeds**

Then last week we looked at how God delights in working in ways that no one expects by using the smallest of beginnings to bring about his mighty works in the parables of **the Mustard Seed and the Leaven**

This morning we are going to consider two parables that form another pair much like the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven did last week

And the overall theme of the parable of the Treasure and the parable of the Pearl is **the exceeding value of the kingdom**

We will begin this morning by looking at **the details** of the two parables

Then we will take some time to examine the **two “finders”**

And then we will consider some **truths** that we should take from these parables as we seek to apply them to our lives

If you would, open your Bibles to Matthew 13 and follow along as I read 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.”*

## **I. The Details**

The details of both of these parables are easy to identify

### ***The Parable of the Treasure***

In the parable of the treasure we see a man who finds a treasure that someone had hidden in a field

It was quite common for people who lived in areas that were frequently overrun by invading forces, such as Palestine was, to bury their prized possessions to hide them from the invaders before they fled the area

Then, for whatever reason, they weren't always able to make it back to retrieve those caches of treasure and they could lay hidden for years

And the chances that anyone would ever discover the treasure in that case would have been rather remote and purely by chance

Much like the couple in our first illustration that just happened to notice the lip of the rusty can and then been curious enough to dig it up long after it had been buried

But the man in the parable found the treasure and then he hides the treasure once more and goes and sells everything he owns and buys the field

We might wonder why he didn't just keep the treasure but in ancient Palestine the law stated that the treasure rightfully belonged to whoever owned the field

So he wisely and shrewdly made sure the treasure was safely stowed and kept his mouth shut until he had raised the money to buy the field and claim the treasure by selling all that he had

### ***Protest***

Now some might protest that his actions seem unethical and on their face he does seem to violate the biblical moral code of fairness to others and perhaps even the laws of found property as they existed at the time

But we need to recognize that the parable isn't meant to address those issues at all

### **The parable is about a treasure that is worth whatever sacrifice is necessary in order to possess it**

Once more we are reminded that we have to be careful not to take parables farther than Jesus intended

We need to read and understand the parables according to the truth Jesus is teaching within them

### ***The Parable of the Pearl***

The details of the parable of the pearl are very similar to the parable of the treasure

And we know that the parables are meant to be linked to one another by the word "Again" that begins the parable of the pearl

A merchant discovers a pearl that is very valuable and he sells all he has to raise the money to buy it for himself

He isn't deterred by the price of the pearl but does whatever he has to in order to make it his own

So both parables address the same subject of the exceeding value of the kingdom of God but from a different perspective which we'll dig into in a few minutes

### ***What the parables are NOT teaching***

But before we get to that we need to address what the parables are NOT teaching

### **Neither of these parables is suggesting we can "buy" or otherwise "earn" our salvation**

That would be a gross misreading of the parables that would cause them to contradict the very clear and direct teaching of other portions of Scripture to the contrary

We know that salvation is by God's grace to us alone as we read in **Ephesians 2:8-9** –

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

So the parables aren't about how one becomes a Christian and one doesn't need to sell all their possessions in order to become a Christian

All we must – in fact all we *can* – do to be saved is accept the gift of redemption through the shed blood of Jesus Christ

**What both of these parables illustrate is what a person who truly recognizes the value of the fullness of the kingdom will do in order to possess it**

Remember, the Jews of Jesus' day were expecting a physical, earthly kingdom where the Jews would be out from under the control of Rome when the kingdom of God came into power

To this point they had never even considered the kingdom of heaven having an individual, personal manifestation and that the kingdom was concerned with transforming individual lives; not with overthrowing earthly governments

And Jesus' symbols in these parables are meant to show that the actual kingdom of heaven, as a spiritual kingdom, is worth so much more than any temporary, earthly kingdom could ever be

And both of the men in the parables immediately recognized the value of what they had found and took action

So, let's take a look at our two "finders" and see what we can learn about what Jesus was intending for his disciples to understand about the kingdom of heaven from their examples

## **II. Two "Finders"**

Although the parables of the hidden treasure and the valuable pearl are very similar and teach the same truth of the exceeding value of the kingdom, the symbols of the two "finders" represent two very different types of people

### **A. The first was a stumbler**

First, we have the one in the parable of the hidden treasure that I refer to as **the stumbler**

This man was probably a hired man of some sort who was simply going about his work in the normal course of a day

We can infer this because he was in a field that wasn't his

But the point is, he wasn't looking for anything of value – he just stumbled upon it inadvertently

We aren't told what form the treasure took; whether it was a jar of gold or silver coins or jewels or something else entirely – but the man recognized it as valuable right away

And since it was worth more than everything else he owned combined he eagerly sold all his possessions for the sake of the treasure he had found

**The apostle Paul** is a prime example of someone who found the treasure of the kingdom unexpectedly

Remember that Paul wasn't seeking anything except Christians on whom he could vent his rage

He wasn't looking for treasure because, religiously, culturally, and genealogically, he thought he already had it

But then the Lord arrested him on the road to Damascus and presented the kingdom and, immediately upon recognizing its value, Paul gave up all he had to possess it

Turn with me to **Philippians 3:5-9** and we will see just what Paul was willing to give up for the kingdom

**Paul begins by listing his remarkable credentials as a Jew –**

*[He writes that he was] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.*

He had it all as far as Judaism goes but then notice what he says about all that in **verses 7-9** –

***But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order 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 comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith***

And Paul could not have been under any delusions about what fully accepting the kingdom was going to mean for him personally

After Paul's Damascus Road experience had left him blind and helpless, the Lord appeared to a man named Ananias and in **Acts 9:15-16** we see that the Lord told Ananias –

*“Go, for [Paul] is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”*

New Testament scholar, William Hendriksen put it this way –

“...the kingdom of heaven, the glad recognition of God's rule over heart and life, including salvation for the present and for the future, for soul and ultimately also for the body, the great privilege of being thereby made a blessing to others to the glory of God, all this, is a treasure so inestimably precious that one who obtains it is willing to surrender for it whatever could interfere with having it.”

Paul had a good life as a Pharisee; he was well regarded and he wielded a lot of power

But he readily and without reservation gave it all up for the kingdom of heaven even though he was shown that the kingdom of heaven meant not only giving all that up, but also grave and ongoing difficulties and even persecution for him in this world

So Paul is a great example from Scripture of a man in the mold of the stumbler from the parable of the hidden treasure. He wasn't looking for treasure but when he found it he had to have it without regard to what it cost him

## **B. The second was a seeker**

But man in the parable of the valuable pearl wasn't a stumbler he was **a seeker**

We see in verse 45 (**Matthew 13:45**) that he was *“a merchant in search of fine pearls”* when he was presented with a pearl that was exceedingly valuable and priced accordingly

Rather than being deterred by the price the man liquidated his assets to raise the funds to buy it

The man was on a mission to find a pearl of surpassingly great value – that was his business and he was confident of its existence or he wouldn't have been looking for it

And he was prepared to recognize it and when he did he, like the stumbler, was willing to do whatever he had to do to obtain it – even if it cost him everything he had

**The centurion, Cornelius**, of Acts 10 is a good example of someone who was looking for the truth that he knew had to exist

**Acts 10:2** describes him as –

*...a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God.*

And by the end of Acts 10, Peter had come to his house and presented the message of the Gospel and Cornelius and all those who heard Peter's message trusted in the Lord and were saved

But Cornelius was also a centurion in the Roman army and Roman soldiers were forced by law to worship the emperor and while we aren't told of his fate beyond this event, his becoming a Christian could well have cost him everything – perhaps even his life

We aren't told what started Cornelius searching for the truth but he was a true seeker and he was doing everything he knew to find the truth

And when God orchestrated people and events to cause the truth of the kingdom to be presented to him; he was prepared to recognize it and willing to give up everything he had for it simply because he recognized its surpassing worth

So, Paul was a stumbler and Cornelius was a seeker and Scripture is filled with numerous other examples of stumblers and seekers

## ***Lee and Leslie Strobel***

And we still have them today

A modern day example of both is found in one well-known couple – **Lee and Leslie Strobel**

Lee is the best-selling Christian author of the book, [The Case for Christ](#) and several other books but how he came to be a Christian and how he came to write that first book is very interesting

Lee was a respected, award-winning journalist who also had a law degree from Yale when his wife, Leslie, gave in to a neighbor's repeated invitations to be her guest at her church

Leslie wasn't interested in church and says she only eventually went just to get her neighbor to stop asking her

She was probably more surprised than anyone when she found herself attracted to what she heard at that church and, in time, Leslie became a Christian

That didn't set too well with Lee – who, by the way, was an avowed atheist – and knowing that he didn't want to be married to a Christian he set out to use his skills as a journalist and lawyer to disprove the claims of Christianity

So he set out to interview 13 well-respected authorities concerning historical evidence outside the Bible for the existence of Jesus

The project lasted 1 year and 9 months and in the end, Lee said, "I became personally convinced that based on the historical evidence of the Resurrection, that this is actually true."

As a result, Lee also accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior in 1981

Then in 1987, he quit his high-powered job as the legal editor for the Chicago Tribune and took a 60-percent cut in pay to become the teaching pastor at Willow Creek Church in South Barrington, IL

Leslie was seeking nothing except to placate her neighbor when she found the kingdom and Lee was seeking the truth that he thought would disprove Christianity when he found the kingdom –

And so we see that the couple consisted of a stumbler and a seeker who were married to one another

Neither one of them expected precisely what they found

But when they found the kingdom, they both knew it was worth everything they had

### **III. Truths for Application**

I began this sermon with some stories about found treasure and, not coincidentally, the first story featured a pair of stumblers and the second a pair of seekers

I have one more short story to share that might just make you a little sick if you picture yourself doing what some anonymous person did –

In the summer of 2008, an unknown donor pulled up to a Goodwill store in Easton, MD and dropped off a painting that they figured would be displayed alongside the other cast-offs one normally encounters at a Goodwill store

But an employee noticed the painting while sorting through the day's donations and gave it a closer look

They noticed that the painting had a little gold embossed nameplate that listed the artist's name and the painting's title

Thinking that the painting just might be valuable, Goodwill called upon experts from the world-renowned Sotheby's auction house to get their opinion and an appraisal of the painting's worth

It turned out to be a genuine work by French Impressionist, Edouard Leon Cortes called "Mulberry Inspirations: Fresh Flowers from the Market" and it was ultimately sold by Sotheby's at auction for \$40,600

That's a great illustration of **the first truth** for us to apply from this parable

#### **A. We must properly value the kingdom**

It's imperative that we **properly value the kingdom**

Because without proper valuation we won't commit to kingdom life with everything we have

Remember that the kingdom of heaven as Jesus describes it in the parables describes life among God's people

In other words what Jesus says about the kingdom of heaven describes the church and it tells us what we, as believers can expect now and in the future

And as we know very well being a true disciple of our Lord is not without its cost and to be a sold-out citizen of the kingdom could well cost us everything

**Let's briefly consider what God's Word tells us about the kingdom**

**Colossians 1:13** tells us that it is a safe refuge from the powers of darkness

**Romans 14:17** tells us that the kingdom is a place of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit

**Hebrews 12:28** tells us that it is a place of unshakable security

**Revelation 11:15** tells us that it will one day be an all-encompassing and eternal kingdom

And **Matthew 13:43** tells us that the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom

But perhaps we still think that being completely sold out for the kingdom is too high a price to pay for the value received

What do we think **Stephen**, the first Christian martyr from Acts 6-7 would say?

Or any of the other **early Christians** who suffered persecution that led to the disruption of their lives and even imprisonment for some?

And we know that even today there are **Christians suffering martyrdom** in other parts of the world– what value do you think they would put on the kingdom?

Or any of **our loved ones** who have died in Christ and are right now in the presence of the Lord?

**If we could ask any of them about the value of the kingdom I'm confident they would tell us it's worth everything we could possibly pay and then some**

Everyone who is saved has already discovered the kingdom of heaven whether they did so as a stumbler or a seeker

But it's up to every believer – even a fully sold-out believer who has properly appraised the kingdom - to become a seeker in order to fully experience the value of the kingdom in this life

And that leads us to our next truth:

## **B. We must seek the fullness of the kingdom**

First, we need to **study the Scriptures like the Ethiopian eunuch** in Acts 8

You remember him, right?

Philip was sent to a deserted place where he found the eunuch sitting in his chariot and reading the Scriptures

But when Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading the eunuch had to admit he needed someone to help him understand and so Philip explained the gospel and the eunuch was saved

But the point is the eunuch was dedicated to understanding

- He had purchased a copy of the Scriptures which would have been very expensive back then
- He was actually spending time reading and studying the Scriptures – he was giving them his time and attention
- He was willing to apply the Scriptures to the best of his understanding – giving control of his life over to God
- And he was open to hearing what others might have to share regarding the Scriptures – he gave up his autonomy

If we want to experience the fullness of God's kingdom in this life we must follow the example of the Ethiopian eunuch because it's in God's Word that we discover what life in the kingdom consists of

But we must also follow the example of **the Bereans** in Acts 17

- We certainly want to be open to what others have to share about life in the kingdom because God's provided his kingdom with teachers for the equipping of his saints
- But it's incumbent upon every believe to work to understand what others are saying to them and to be diligent to verify that it is correct
- And to subject whatever others are saying to the ultimate authority of God's Word
- And we do well at that when we are continually and habitually "examining the Scriptures" to verify that what others are saying is actually true

## Conclusion

In our two parables this morning we saw two very different types of men who made the right choice to sell-out for the very valuable treasure once they found it

So, which of the two men would you say is most worthy of our imitation?

Both men recognized true value when they saw it and did whatever was necessary to obtain what was most valuable

But the merchant seems to be more noble because he was actively searching for what he ultimately found

Now, for the unsaved person who has the treasure of the gospel presented to them it matters little whether they were a stumbler or a seeker

But for us, as Christ-followers I believe we need to do like the merchant and actively seek to understand life in God's kingdom so as to please him

And if we do, we can trust God to lead us to the "pearl of great value" so that we can obtain it whatever form it might take in each individual circumstance

Perhaps some of you may still have doubts and are considering holding something in reserve and not selling out for the kingdom

Let's close by turning to **Mark 10:28-30** where we see that the blessings of the kingdom are not just found in eternity but first in this life and then more fully and perfectly in the next and that the return for surrendering all we have for the kingdom pays unimaginable dividends –

*Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.*

How we respond to God's truth when we find it determines the value we place on the kingdom of heaven and if we properly value it we will put the kingdom first in our lives and pay the price of surrendering fully to the will of God

Let's pray