

Title: “Of Infinite Value” Series: “Stories Jesus Told” July 30, 2017

Pastor Dave Sattler Text: Matthew 13:44-46, Parables: Treasure & Pearls

Sources: NIV Life Application Bible. Commentaries: R.T. France, Craig Keener, & Michael Wilkins. Books: Walter Elwell’s “Evangelical Dictionary of Theology” & Donald Guthrie’s “New Testament Theology.” Website: bible.org - kid’s lesson by Jodi Hooper (2007). Wikipedia: Essenes. Sermon: Mark Peters, NSAC, 7/23/2017.

I. Introduction:

- Good morning, everyone. I’m Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC.
- <Slide> Today we continue our summer series in the parables.
- “Stories Jesus Told” ... to expose — things in the world, in society, in us, and to invoke a response — call His audience to action. [MP, NSAC, 7/23/2017]
- Matthew Chapter 13 is full of parables; records 8 Jesus seems to tell in rapid fire.
- The situation: Jesus in on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee — about ‘here-to-Chilliwack-away’ from Jerusalem.
- Jesus has just come off a peculiar interaction (Mt 12) with family from his nearby hometown of Nazareth where He sides with His spiritual brothers and sisters and distances Himself from His biological family — who don’t seem to comprehend His identity or understand His mission.
- Then comes another confrontation with religious leaders, likely in the city of Capernaum.
- After which, looking for solitude, Jesus sits by the Sea of Galilee, when a crowd gathers.
- So, He hops in a boat and tells a series of stories, “while all the people stood on the shore” (Mt 13:2b) and listened. Parables 1 through 4 are told in this venue.
- <Slide> Interesting, much of Jesus’ ministry activity actually takes place right here, in what some biblical archaeologists refer to as “The Evangelical Triangle,” at the confluence of busy trade-routes from Asia, Africa, & Europe.
- One had to walk or chariot or horseback through this triangle of real estate in order to get to or from any of those regions of the world. Full of people from many walks of life, with all nations passing by on its International Highways, this was a prime location for Jesus to get the Word out — to talk about the Kingdom.
- Now Jesus has “left the crowd” (Mt 13:36a) and gone indoors, presumably to Peter’s house in Capernaum. And turns attention to His disciples.
- We hone in this morning on parables #6 and #7 recorded in Matthew 13. Both very short.
- Please turn there now on your electronic device, or p.795 or p.1519 in the blue Bibles you can find in the seat-rack in front of you.
- But first, while you’re turning there, here’s a story to whet your appetite ...
- <Slide> ILL - A fond memory I have from childhood ...
 - Was tagging along with my father on Saturday trips to the Dump.
 - One particular day we tipped a huge load of junk out the back of our van.
 - But, some of it got stuck on the tailgate so I jumped down into the mess — slimy, smelly, seagull-infested trash.
 - After chucking the remaining items into the giant pile of garbage, I walked back to the front of the van and kicked a brown paper bag.
 - To my surprise and glee, about 4 \$20 bills flew out! I yelled, quickly bent down, and began to collect the valuable treasure I’d just stumbled across.
 - Best kick of my life! All totalled there was \$86.10.

- o Actually \$86.35, but, in sheer delight, I turned hurled one of the quarters I'd just found deep into the landfill. I felt so unexpectedly rich.
- <Slide> Let's read the text, Matthew 13:44-46. [READ] PRAY: 'Lord, move me out of the way. Come, speak to us by Your Spirit. We're hungry to hear from You. Amen.'

II. Parables Outline:

1. <Slide> Parable 1: Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44)

- This is the stuff of legends and pirates: 'Argh! Buried treasure!'
- Far-fetched today in an era of banks and safety deposit boxes and liquid assets, but relatable in the ancient world where people held on to all their wealth and often hid their coins, jewels, & precious metals — burying them in a glass jar or strongbox to secure their fortune.
- For the threat of theft was very real. When a marauding army approached, people stashed valuables. And, if a landowner did not survive an invasion, the treasure would remain buried — forgotten and unclaimed. Over the years, land could change hands several times and its hidden treasure would go unnoticed.
- "A man" found a "treasure hidden in a field." It's unclear who this man was. What we do know is that this was not pre-meditated. He wasn't out with a metal detector searching clandestinely for valuables on someone else's property. The man was not looking.
- Perhaps he was just passing through and stumbled upon the treasure by accident? Or, this piece of land was up for sale and he was walking the property before he made an offer when he happened upon the fortune? Or, maybe he was a poor peasant employed by the landowner and working the soil when he made his unexpected discovery?
- Regardless, he quickly re-hid the treasure, then "in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field." This treasure was of infinite value.

2. <Slide> Parable 2: A Fine Pearl (Matthew 13:45-46)

- ILL - One of the most fascinating scientific processes God has set up is ...
 - o How pearls come from oysters — those tasty, little, underwater creatures that live inside a shell with two parts hinged together like this. [DEMO]
 - o Oysters open up their shells to let water and food in.
 - o And sometimes a piece of sand or shell sneaks in — a foreign body, and the oyster recognizes it and creates a defence-coating to cover it.
 - o As time goes on, more and more layers of this coating are added.
 - o Eventually, after several years, the former irritant ends up looking like a beautiful, shiny stone called a pearl.
 - o The bigger and rounder, the more precious the pearl is.
 - o Pearls were especially valuable in Jesus' day. They were a conspicuous way of displaying wealth — particularly on a woman's necklace. Treasure seekers searched the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, & Indian Ocean for those special oyster shells with pearls inside.
- The man in this second parable is an astute "merchant looking for fine pearls."
- Uniquely sensitive to the value of a pearl, he knows exactly what he wants, where to look.
- In contrast to the man in the first parable who stumbles accidentally on his fortune, this is a man with capital, on a deliberate mission, willing to pay the highest price for the right product. Though surely he understands that the finest pearls are always the most elusive.

- And, when he finds what he is looking for, the experienced pearler sells “everything” he has to buy it. It’s worth it. For this one pearl’s value eclipses all the others’ put together.

3. <Slide> [The Kingdom of Heaven is like ...] (Matthew 13:44a)

- As one commentator says, Q: “Once the kingdom of heaven is truly understood, nothing else can compare with it in value.” — R.T. France, p.541.
- Some explanation is necessary of this term, “kingdom of heaven,” one used regularly throughout Matthew’s gospel.
- The kingdom of heaven is God’s reign and rule actively invading the kingdom of Satan.
- It is the divine authority given by the Father to His Son, Jesus, to subdue all that is hostile to God. And bring deliverance from darkness and new life to humanity. [Elwell, p.607]
- The kingdom of heaven is both, future — it will be fully inaugurated when Jesus returns, and also, present, in the sense that, though sin still permeates the human race today, God’s power continues to break through and touches peoples’ lives.
- Like a buried treasure and a precious pearl, God’s kingdom must be found. It’s available now, yet it still remains “hidden” to some. Few recognize its value and orient their lives accordingly.
- The kingdom of heaven is supernatural — not bound by things on this earth, it transcends the natural world order of things.
- And, there’s another paradox, still: the kingdom of heaven is, at the same time, both simply received with child-like faith, and costly. It’s worth all we have. And then some!

III. <Slide> Application:

- Time to ‘land the plane’ on the sermon with a few application points ...
- Let’s be clear: these parables are not some manipulative plea for us to sell all we have in order to obtain the kingdom.
- Truth is we’ll never have enough to offer God in exchange for all He has. Instead, herein lies a clarion call to desire the King, Jesus, and His kingdom, above all other things.
- The stories of hidden treasure and a fine pearl are intended to expose the true trajectory of our hearts. And raise some BQs: What’s your passion? What keeps you up at night? Makes your heart pump with excitement? What do you long for most? When all the ‘fluff’ in your life is stripped away, what’s your heart’s deepest desire?

1. I have to say, **There’s nothing worth more.**

- The incomparable value of the kingdom is stressed here in our 2 parables.
- <Slide> ILL - In 1998, James Hill found a small cave full of emeralds ...
 - On his family property in North Carolina.
 - The total weight of the emeralds was about 3,300 carats. (In comparison, the typical diamond on a wedding ring is a quarter or a half a carat.)
 - Turns out Hill’s emeralds were some of the best quality emeralds in North America. When they were cut and polished, they were worth millions of dollars. Right in the man’s own backyard! And it really changed him.
 - Mr. Hill became obsessed with the fear that people would sneak onto his land and grab whatever pieces of emerald they could find. So he hired guards to protect his jewels and his property.

- o And, worried that his emerald supply would one day run out, Mr. Hill fixated on finding more digging up large chunks of his land in search. But evidently, there was only a limited supply of emeralds.
- **<Slide> APP - Jesus and His kingdom are offered freely, without limit.**
- There's always more of Him.
- And, Jesus is entirely accessible to all humanity — without prejudice. No exclusions.
- It's easy to get sucked in to this world's competing ideologies and play along with everyone else: obsess about accumulating our fortunes and possessions, building our status, fixate on becoming successful (or at least appearing to be so), gaining followers, or running from one experience, one relationship to another.
- When none of these pursuits are worth our full devotion.
- And none of the 'glory' these things promise or deliver, ever last.
- It's why, earlier in cf. Matthew 6:20, Jesus warns His audience,
 - o Q: "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal."
- Jesus Himself lived simply and most citizens of the 1st Century Roman Empire would have found Jesus' call here unduly radical. Including His disciples. As do, I daresay, most Vancouver-ites today in our anti-Christian, West Coast culture, who might balk at Christianity and its claims, Q: 'Who really needs your Jesus when I can have all of this?!'
- But, Jesus is the One Pearl of great price. His beauty, His love, His presence never fade.

2. **<Slide> There's a cost to following Jesus.**

- Focus, in both of Jesus' short parables, is on the price each man was willing to pay.
- To remain single-minded in commitment to Jesus, sacrifice is required.
- ILL - The Essenes were a sect of Judaism that flourished ...
 - o From 2nd century BC to 1st century AD. Jewish historian, Josephus recorded large numbers of them throughout Roman Judaea. They've gained notoriety in modern times as a result of the discovery at En Gedi of the Dead Sea Scrolls, commonly believed to be the Essenes' library.
 - o The Essenes shared spiritual beliefs and congregated in communal life dedicated to asceticism: some groups practised celibacy, voluntary poverty, & daily water immersion, as a reminder of their need for God's constant 'cleansing' — death to the world's way of living.
 - o The life-rule of the Essenes: sacrifice, the giving up of earthly pleasures beyond the basics of food and water, so as to stay wholeheartedly devoted to God.
- Bible commentator, R.T. France says, Q: "It is only those who make the kingdom of heaven their top priority who will enjoy its blessings." — p.539.
- ILL - It was Jim Elliot, missionary to Ecuador in the 1950's, who once said,
 - o Q: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep (the stuff of this world) to gain what he cannot lose (the treasure of life with Jesus — now and for eternity)."
 - o In 1956, in the line of duty, Elliot was murdered by the very tribal people he was attempting to reach.
- **<Slide> APP - Here's the point: following Jesus costs us.**
- Sadly, Christian spirituality is not Jesus PLUS my efforts, my achievements, my desires.
- Or, Jesus as an ADD-ON to my already busy life. Fit Him in between work and the gym.

- Or, ME and Jesus — He’s a pretty good guy and I’ll take a ‘mild dose’ of church and Jesus — ‘good for me, good for my family, hey, good for Jesus too, He’s pretty lucky to have me!’
- No! Jesus is calling us to something far more pricey. And, not that easy ...
- The Apostle Paul describes firsthand the cost of discipleship in cf. Philippians 3:7-8:
 - Q: “But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.”
- Q: “The kingdom of heaven is more valuable than anything else we can have, and a person must be willing to give up everything to obtain it.” — NIV Life App Bible, p.1678.
- And, when we truly bow-the-knee to follow Jesus, a ‘great exchange’ takes place: our life for His. What a sweet swap!

3. <Slide> For **There’s great joy found in Jesus!**

- There is a certain child-like naivete, a joyful abandon in the man who sees the glorious treasure and is then willing to sacrifice everything. Doesn’t flinch or bat an eye, he sells all he has to ‘buy in.’
- APP - Another thing I love about the Christian Story: whether you’re like a ‘poor peasant,’ desperate, struggling to make it, not even sure what you’re looking for, OR, if you’re like a wealthy merchant, as yet unsatisfied with your current assets, on a life-quest for something fine ... God’s invitation of His kingdom extends even to you.
- We are all confronted with the same choice: see the treasure and go back to your old way of life OR, see God and His kingdom and want it more than anything else.
- This is the response Jesus is driving at.
- For many, the fear of making decisions, “jumping in by faith,” paralyzes us.
- Others are maybe waiting around for a better option when the treasure of Jesus is right in front — staring us in the face, there for the taking.
- I say, ‘Don’t be afraid to jump in on Jesus!’ Best decision you could ever make!
- ILL - The cynical part of you might wish to right off my words.
 - ‘Predictable, He’s a pastor. Gets paid to promote Jesus.’
 - Or perhaps you think it’s easy for pastors working in a Christian church environment to feel God’s joy all the time.
 - Reality is: often I too miss the gift of Jesus and His kingdom.
 - In the trenches, with people in crisis and tragedy, facing opposition, I sometimes lose sight of the tremendous joy it is to know Jesus personally and the privilege it is to help others walk with Jesus more closely.
- <Slide> In Cf. John 10:10, Jesus reminds,
 - Q: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”
- Frankly, I’m tired of it!
- In my life I’ve wasted far too much energy allowing the thief to “steal,” “kill,” and “destroy.” How about you? Focused on the wrong narrative, the wrong values, the wrong messages Satan and this world shout your way and you’ve overlooked the infinite treasure of the kingdom, of Jesus, and all the fullness He offers, right there in front of you?!
- Deep down, I have come to believe with certainty: Jesus, His kingdom, the new life and transformation He alone can bring, the cause of Christ ... is worth giving my entire life to.

- The kingdom is much more than just the bliss of going to heaven when we die.
- It's also here and now — knowing the Father, hearing His voice, experiencing His love, power, & joy. Needing Him, trusting Him alone to meet our needs.
- I am even coming to embrace the posture of 'sitting' — 'resting in that place' where I have no other plan but to count on Jesus.
- Yes it will always be difficult, but also incredibly freeing. The never-dull adventure of relinquishing control and allowing God to lead our lives is beautiful. And, so good for us.
- And, as ambassadors of the kingdom, we get to share this "treasure we've found" with family, friends, & neighbours. And watch, as they begin to welcome Jesus' presence into their lives. This too brings great joy!
- Best life possible. True joy. Life to the full. Found only in Jesus. 'Jesus, there is no one like You. Oh, how we need You.' Amen.