

<sup>44</sup> *“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.*

<sup>45</sup> *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. <sup>46</sup> When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.*

<sup>47</sup> *“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. <sup>48</sup> When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. <sup>49</sup> This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

<sup>51</sup> *“Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked.*

*“Yes,” they replied.*

<sup>52</sup> *He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.” (Matthew 13:44-52 NIV2011)*

### **Hold Tightly to the Treasure**

It had to have been quite the find. How else do you explain the reaction? You had heard about how people would bury their valuables in their fields to protect it from wars, raids, and burglars. Home-security wasn't exactly top-notch at the time. But you had no idea you would find this! There you were, minding your own business, as you walk through this field. You had no clue you would find such treasure! For you, it was a no brainer. It didn't matter what your friends and family would say. You knew that having a comfortable life now could wait. You knew setting yourself up for later in life was a tomorrow you problem. You are just so excited. You can barely contain your joy. You immediately put your home on the market. You empty out all your stocks and bank accounts. You sell everything including your own most-prized possessions. Nothing was as valuable as this treasure. You couldn't let it slip through your fingers. You need to buy this field so this treasure could be yours. It didn't matter the cost; it was worth it.

The second guy is much like the first. The main difference is you searching for some valuable treasure. You have an eye for it too. You know what you are looking for. You're good at it. Business is booming. Life is good. You knew there was always bigger, better, more valuable pearls out there. And that was part of the fun. You enjoy the search and hunt for the next one. But then you see it. You didn't think it was possible. But there it is. Out of all the many fine pearls you had seen, this one pearl is over and above the rest. This one changes everything. No need to keep searching. No need to keep bargaining. Sell the

business. Sell everything. No cost was too great. You had to have and hold onto that treasure.

That's what the kingdom of God is like, as Jesus tells it in Matthew 13. He's not teaching us about business practices or money usage. He's not commenting on the ethics of what you should do if you find a treasure in the field or anything about "finders keepers." Instead, he's teaching you about the kingdom of heaven and how it is a treasure beyond worth.

The kingdom of heaven itself is God's rule in our lives, on this earth, and in heaven above. It's having a right relationship with God. It's his protection and providing in your life. It's being washed with the blood of Jesus with all sins forgiven and not held against you. It's having a claim to citizenship in heaven with all of the fringe benefits. You have a clean conscience before God freed from sin standing in defiance of the great liar and accuser the devil. It means being free from fear of death and confident in Christ for this life and the next. It's the Spirit working in you and through you so God is pleased with especially the "little" things you do. It's hearing Jesus' speak to you in the Word of God. It's being physically touched with his love in the Sacraments. What a treasure this is. It's far more valuable and worth more than anything. This isn't an exaggeration or hyperbole. Jesus promises it is.

So, are you ready? Get those deposit slips ready to go. Start talking to some real estate agents. Get ready to leave your cell phone, your car, your favorite shirt, everything so that you can have this treasure. Of course that's not what Jesus is teaching in this parable either. But that is the attitude that God wants us to have when it comes to this treasure of being part of his kingdom. It's an attitude that everything else is less than garbage compared to being in possession of this treasure (Philippians 3:7-9). It's a willingness to leave everything behind, sell it all, in order to keep it.

Do you feel that way? Do you act that way? When think about your life, is there anything you are unwilling to "sell" if it came between you and having this treasure? Maybe it is your possessions and your things—they have a hold on you that you are not willing to go. There's money itself. When you give your offerings, is it whatever's left over after all the other bills have gone out? Is it just whatever is in your wallet as you go past the offering plate? Is it in proportion to your income? Or maybe it's the talk of money in the church that rubs you the wrong way. But the church would never have money problems or need to talk about money if all of God's people had the attitude that God calls us to have in this parable...

But there's so much more than just our physical things that we are unwilling to "sell." It's our reputation with our friends and our status with other people. It's our relationship with our children, our grandchildren, with wives and husbands where we ignore sin or neglect to share Jesus. Would you be willing to let go of and not have certain experiences in life in order to have and keep this treasure of God's kingdom?

It maybe your struggle with certain sins. Sometimes you may find yourself doing something you know you shouldn't do and you know God's Word says you shouldn't. But you do it because you want to. And so you've decided that's worth more than the treasure of God's kingdom.

What good things do you value too much? What sins are you not turning away from and allowing to get between you and this treasure? We've seen it happen to others. At one point they seemed to really value the kingdom of heaven. But as time went on we've seen less and less of them. What happened? Many will readily admit: it's a priority thing. In other words: the treasure wasn't worth as much as something else. No one is immune to this. Be careful so that you too do not fall (1 Corinthians 10:12).

But why? It's just treasure. Some people are going to value it and some will not, right?

We move to Jesus' third parable today. This time the kingdom is not treasure but it's like a net that is thrown out into the waters. As this great big net is drawn back in, fish are caught, and drawn to shore. The workers then sort the fish. The good fish go into vessels to be sold in the market. But the bad, rotten, worthless fish and are thrown away. Makes sense.

But what's the connection to the first two parables in this section? Again, we are talking about the kingdom of heaven. Whereas the first two speak to the great value of the treasure, this third one speaks to those who do not cherish it. Until the time where we are drawn into that net the good and bad, believers and unbelievers are swimming together in the world. On the Last Day, the end of the age all will be drawn in and the angels will come to do the Lord's work: separate. There will be a judging where God decides what to do with you. The evil ones will be pulled out and thrown in the fiery furnace of hell where you cannot get away from the eternal weeping and wailing because they did not have this treasure. How much worse it will be for those who had this treasure, who knew about it, but they rejected the gift. It's one thing to know about a treasure; it's another to have it in your possession.

How many people are going through life looking for nuggets of treasure in their status, reputations, so much saved up for retirement, filling up their life scrapbook with experiences, simply wanting a good life, and are still missing something? Sure those are good to have and for different people there are certain values. But Jesus wants to impress on our minds: nothing is more precious or valuable—effecting your eternal welfare here and now—than taking possession of this treasure of God's kingdom. This isn't a passing fad that will lose its value over time. It's not a treasure whose worth is dependent on having the market with the right buyers and sellers. Without this treasure, like those worthless, bad fish, you will be thrown into the fiery furnace of hell.

So how do we get it? How do you keep it? God doesn't call you to go home, sell all your things in order to have this treasure. It would never come close to being able to buy it. And he doesn't even want you try. He doesn't call you to go home today and take a pilgrimage

somewhere, give up your job, do a certain amount of good, extraordinary things or even change actions to try and earn this treasure. Again, it wouldn't come close to covering the cost. And he wants you to stop trying to do that too.

The thing about this treasure is that you can't purchase it or earn it. The cost was too great for you. So God gives you another treasure in his Son Jesus. Jesus sees the asking price for that kingdom of heaven and says, "I've got it. I'll pay it in full." And so he goes to work putting in the hours living perfectly for you because he wants nothing more than for you to have this treasure. For the joy of winning that treasure he goes to the cross and laughs at its shame because he knows what he is going to do. He sees the ticket price and knows the cost is great. But his holy and precious blood is greater. So he pays it in full with his perfect life and innocent death. The debt of your sins is already paid at the cross—it is finished. And now because Jesus lives, for you, the cost of this treasure of God's kingdom is nothing. It comes to you even without your asking. It's a free gift that God asks nothing in return.

For some of you, you just stumbled on this gift. You didn't go looking for it, but someone brought you as a baby to the baptismal font. There God gave you this treasure wrapping you his saving arms with the water and Word of baptism. You were made God's child and declared citizen of his kingdom. He put his name on you and promises to bless, keep you, and give you peace that surpasses understanding. Others maybe were searching for something, for answers in life, or you didn't realize you were searching. But God then worked through someone who shared His Word. And through that word faith is created reaching out and this treasure of God's kingdom becomes your own. Whether you stumbled on it or you found it, God is the one who led you to it, and He sends the Holy Spirit to work through Word and Sacrament so that faith holds tightly to that treasure.

Having this treasure changes everything. It gives you a new perspective on life and the blessings God gives your life today. Having this treasure is not something to keep hidden away in the fields or dark recesses of our closets. No, this is a treasure to be used and shown off bringing out the old with the new. We hold dearly to those old truths of the bible of sin and grace, Jesus' love for me and the Father's continued care and protection. Cherish these old truths and apply them in new ways. Continue to grow in this treasure and the more and better you will understand what a valuable treasure it is. Live your life to show all people that the single most important and valuable thing in this life is your relationship with Jesus. Hold onto that treasure. Amen.