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Sermon Notes

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The Exclusive Joy of the Greatest Treasure

Matthew 13:44-46

What is the greatest treasure of your life?

Treasure hunting stories

Context in Matthew 13

I. A Treasure and a Pearl: The Infinite Value of Christ and His Kingdom

A. The Treasure Hidden in the Field

1. Why treasure would be hidden in a field

- a. banks untrustworthy, no other public safe depositories
- b. regular invasions and threat of burglars

MacArthur: “Because Palestine had been a battleground for hundreds of years, families would often even bury food, clothing, and various household objects to protect them from plundering enemy soldiers.”

Josephus: “The gold and the silver and the rest of that most precious furniture which the Jews had and which the owners treasured underground was done to withstand the fortunes of war.”

Matthew 25:18 But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

2. How the hiding place would be used

When they needed money, they would go out at night, secretly dig up their treasure box, take some out, and hide the box again

3. Over the years... forgotten treasure

Perhaps the original owner of the field, the one who'd put the treasure there to begin with, had long since died

Generations had come and go, and no one was left alive who would have even suspected there was treasure in the field

Perhaps the field was now overgrown with weeds... perhaps the man was a worker sent out to prepare the fallow field for a harvest

It was clear the field did not belong to him... he was just a worker in someone else's field, or maybe just a man wandering through it

In either case, the man did not go looking for something... he was surprised by finding it... perhaps STUNNED might be a better word

4. Rabbinic rules

"If a man finds scattered fruit or money, it belongs to the finder." If someone came across money or other valuables that were obviously lost and the owner was long dead, the finder had the right to keep it.

HOWEVER, if the man was in the employment of a master and found it and LIFTED IT OUT of the field, what he found would belong to his master. Thus the man probably found it but did not lift it fully out. The treasure's full extent was unknown to him, but it was clearly worth all of his earthly possessions to obtain it

5. Extreme Joy

The most noteworthy aspect of this story is the incredible joy the man has in selling everything!!

NASB Matthew 13:44 "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

The joy is directly connected to the value of the treasure... it consumes his heart and makes any sacrifice for it worthwhile

Very much like Jacob's attitude toward slaving seven years for Rachel:

Genesis 29:20 So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

So also, any sacrifice this man has to make is nothing compared to the value of the treasure

6. Extreme Commitment

vs. 44 ...he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

B. The Pearl of Great Price

1. Merchant Roaming the Earth, Searching, Searching, Searching!!!

vs. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

a. “merchant” Greek word related to sailors who sail to distant lands

Psalm 107:23 Others went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters.

- Traveling caravans of Midianites carrying spices and incense across the desert
- Traders bringing tribute to Solomon from distant minor kings
- Royal merchants sent out by Solomon to purchase fine horses from Egypt
- Especially the people of Tyre, whose merchants went out far and wide on the Mediterranean Sea to barter for fine merchandise... who travel to distant and strange kingdoms for trade, buying and selling for rare and beautiful things
- History of Europe a history of merchants and their bold courageous travels in search of material wealth: from time of Marco Polo and his search for Chinese silk, through Columbus’s search for a route to the Indies, through the Spanish search for the cities of gold in Mexico through Henry Hudson’s search for a Northwest Passage to the Orient, through Magellan’s search for a route to the Pacific Ocean... and beyond... all these great explorers were truly merchants at heart, looking for wealth through trade
- Ferdinand Magellan: 1520, Willing to risk the hazards of the ocean to find merchandise of great value... Straights of Magellan incredibly perilous, could be dashed against the rocks on one side or the other... Magellan took 38 days to zigzag through the rock-strewn and stormy passage until he triumphantly emerged in the South Ocean which he named Mar Pacifica... the Pacific Ocean... he then turned his leaky ships westward in hopes of soon landing in the wealthy Orient for TRADE. Little did he know that 98 days and 12,000 miles of interminable ocean still lay ahead
- Merchants will do ANYTHING to make a good deal, and the pearl merchant of our story is no different

b. this man a merchant of fine pearls

i) pearls: deeply desired, perhaps above any other valuable thing on earth

Believed produced by dew from heaven, many myths developed over their origin

Pearls are actually caused by a foreign particle somehow making its way into an oyster. The oyster then coats the particle with something called nacre, an iridescent substance with that dazzling sheen so characteristic of pearls

Long known as the "Queen of Gems," pearls possess a history and allure far beyond what today's wearer may recognize. Throughout much of recorded history, a natural pearl necklace comprised of matched spheres was a treasure of almost incomparable value, in fact the most expensive jewelry in the world. Now we see pearls almost as accessories, relatively inexpensive decorations to accompany more costly gemstones.

Before the creation of cultured pearls in the early 1900s, natural pearls were so rare and expensive that they were reserved almost exclusively for the noble and very rich. A jewelry item that today's working women might take for granted, a 16-inch strand of perhaps 50 pearls, often costs between \$500 and \$5,000. At the height of the Roman Empire, when pearl fever reached its peak, the historian Suetonius wrote that the Roman general Vitellius financed an entire military campaign by selling just one of his mother's pearl earrings.

Pearls, in fact, played the pivotal role at the most celebrated banquet in literature. To convince Rome that Egypt possessed a heritage and wealth that put it above conquest, Cleopatra wagered Marc Antony she could give the most expensive dinner in history. The Roman reclined as the queen sat with an empty plate and a goblet of wine (or vinegar). She crushed one large pearl of a pair of earrings, dissolved it in the liquid, then drank it down. Astonished, Antony declined his dinner -- the matching pearl -- and admitted she had won. Pliny, the world's first gemologist, writes in his famous *Natural History* that the two pearls were worth an estimated 60 million sesterces, or 1,875,000 ounces of fine silver (\$9,375,000 with silver at \$5/ounce).

Thus Cleopatra drank a cup of wine worth almost ten million dollars!!!

This is the immense value of pearls in the ancient world

ii) merchant lives and prospers by his eye for quality

vs. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

iii) knows pearls better than any man alive

Spurgeon: "A MERCHANTMAN endeavors to trade so as to make a profit. Whether he deals in pearls or in grain, he does not hope to obtain riches by labor. He leaves that to those who eat their bread in the sweat of their face. He tries to get his by the sweat of his brain. He is dependent not so much upon labor as upon knowledge, upon skill, upon the advantage which superior acquaintance with the article which he deals in gives to him." ["A Great Bargain"]

iv) already has magnificent collection, his inventory of pearls among the finest in the world

v) willing to sell his entire collection AND everything else he owns to obtain it

vs. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

This process, like that of the first man, must have been an incredible experience. No one makes a purchase without assuming that the thing you buy is better than what you give up. You would RATHER have the car, the house, the jewelry, the boat, the candy bar, the groceries, the newspaper, than the money it will take to buy it

You have the money and gladly give it up in exchange for what you

2. Unlike First Man...

- a. knows what he wants
- b. been searching for it all his life
- c. knows it when he sees it... immediately discerns its value

If you asked him, “What are you living for?” he would be able immediately to give you an answer... “I live to find the perfect pearl!”

Spurgeon: “It is different from the man we read of just now who, by accident, discovered a treasure while he was in the field. He was looking for something else, and came upon the treasure. That is the man whom God, in infinite sovereignty, saves, though he was heretofore indifferent and careless. This is a person of a nobler sort. He is of a higher grade of mind-of altogether different mental constitution. He is seeking goodly pearls- something good, not exactly seeking the one pearl of great price, for at first he does not know about it; but, still, he is seeking pearls, and he comes upon one pearl in consequence of his seeking.”

Lesson: the worthiness of searching for God... of yearning for him and seeking Him while He may be found

Many people go through their whole lives hardly thinking at all... numbed by endless visual entertainment, by one movie after another, one visual stimulation after another... by one big game or championship after another... they barely think at all

This pearl merchant is not like that!! He is searching for his livelihood, and when he finds it, he knows it

Summary: So, we have two parables... a man finding something of immense value he was not searching for, and then in his joy selling everything to buy it. Another man searching all over the world for something, finds something worth more than everything he owns, sells everything to buy it

C. One Central Lesson: The Infinite Value of Christ and of His Kingdom

II. Four Questions About the Treasure and the Pearl

A. What is the Treasure and the Pearl?

1. The Treasure IS the Pearl, and the Pearl IS the Treasure... one and the same
2. They represent the Kingdom of Heaven... for all these parables represent an aspect of the Kingdom
3. More personally, however, they represent Christ Himself... in all of his rich value and worth

Richard Sibbes: “Christ Jesus ... is the great pearl, the peerless pearl. Christ is the pearl of infinite value, who therefore became a ransom for many millions that were in bondage... Christ then is this pearl.”

4. Paul Himself found Christ the Treasure and the Pearl worth everything

In Philippians 3: He calls everything in the world dung compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ
 Christ Himself is the treasure hidden in the field... Christ Himself is the pearl of great value. And anything we might sacrifice to obtain Him is an infinite bargain!!

Colossians 2:2-3 in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

B. How May We Obtain the Treasure and the Pearl?

1. The Kingdom of Heaven is PROCLAIMED freely... a spoken message
2. If the message is weighed and by faith accepted at its proper value, the fair exchange is made... if by faith alone, the worker in the field sees the value of the treasure and sells everything to obtain it, he may have it; if by faith alone the searcher for fine pearls is sells everything to obtain it, he may have this treasure, this pearl

Mark 1:15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

3. Kingdom a free gift

Luke 12:32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

4. YET Kingdom the most expensive thing you could ever obtain... it literally costs you everything you have

C. What Must We Part With?

vs. 44 ...he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

vs. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

1. Simple answer #1: everything evil

Mark 1:15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. REPENT and believe the good news!"

- a. ALL SIN must be sold forever!! Sold in your mind, in your heart, identified as evil, marked as a serpent
- b. it is impossible to own sin and the treasure at the same time... we cannot cherish sin as a treasure, hold it, nurse it, protect it, treat as something valuable... AND have the Kingdom as well

Sibbes: "He that retains any one sin can never get this pearl; he that keeps in his heart but one beloved pleasure or profit of this life, let him read, pray, hear, profess never so much, the devil hath him sure by the leg

or by the wing, and as sure as if the whole man were in his hands; for he will willingly suffer a man to go to and use any good exercises, knowing they add to a man's damnation, so long as he retains a secret delight and liking to any lust, let it be never so small." [Works III, 258]

This does not mean sinless perfection... but a settled hatred of sin and refusal to cherish sin as something to be protected... you must SELL ALL SIN, and everything evil

Psalm 66:18 If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened

2. Simple answer #2: everything good that hinders us from Christ

Everything is "Sold" in terms that we understand: even good things that hinder us coming to Christ must be disposed of

Some bridges are burned when we come to Christ... some "friendships" will never be the same again. Our relationships with non-Christian parents or relatives are "sold"... given up in favor of knowing Christ. Our career is "sold"... we will never be as successful in earthly terms now. Our possessions are "sold" if they have hindered us from Christ. Our pastimes and hobbies are "sold" if they have hindered us from coming to Christ

3. Complicated answer: everything and nothing

Key question: do I have to become a wandering beggar, voluntarily taking on poverty to save my soul?

Mark 10:21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Illus. St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) was a popular youth who lived a carefree life as the son of a wealthy Italian cloth merchant. We headed for the successful life of a knight until he was converted through illness to faith in Christ. Soon after, he left home clothed only in a ragged cloak and a rope belt taken from a scarecrow. He took a vow of total poverty and wandered around the countryside begging from the rich, giving to the poor and preaching the gospel

Most Roman Catholic orders require a vow of poverty

Is this what it means to "sell everything"?

Prosperous evangelicals in America answer this one too quickly, "No, of course not!"

They forget that Christ lived this way... John the Baptist lived this way... the Apostles lived this way... the "men of whom the world was not worthy" in Hebrews 11 lived this way:

Hebrews 11:38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

- a. Everything is “sold” in that all of our earthly advantages become marked as Christ’s, and He can claim it anytime He wants... it is ALL His

Illus. Trees marked with orange spray paint... someday the woodsman is coming to take it down

- i) hometown and native land SOLD... someday He may come to claim it

Genesis 12:1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."

So a missionary call may come one day and you will be commanded to leave and go overseas

- ii) earthly possessions SOLD... someday He may come and claim them

Luke 12:33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

A conviction will come from the Spirit to give sacrificially to meet someone’s pressing need, or to advance the gospel... you cannot refuse, because everything was sold the moment you bought the treasure and the pearl!!

- iii) earthly career SOLD... someday He may come to claim it

- iv) earthly reputation SOLD... someday He may come to claim it

He’ll tell you to witness to a co-worker, and you know very well they will either convert or ridicule you, and you may lose the friendship

- v) children SOLD... they are now Christ’s, and someday He may come to claim them

Genesis 22:2 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering

Summary: What must we give up? Everything evil... every good thing that hinders you from trusting Christ... every other thing in your life as Christ demands it from you in service to Him. Everything

BUT: We don’t sell anything and exchange it for Christ and His Kingdom as though we could buy it! For the attempt would be an insult to God’s grace. He means to give us the Kingdom as a gift!

D. What Do We Gain?

1. Gain is INFINITE!!!

Sibbes: "We shall think ourselves no losers in this trade! We shall have Christ, and with him all things.... And therefore Christ in this life promises a return of a hundredfold.... And it stands on God's honor not to make us losers when we trade with him. If we part with riches, pleasures, and honors, life, world, we shall have better riches, better and more enduring pleasures and honors, eternal life, and a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

2. The Blessings of the Kingdom

- a. our souls are saved from eternal wrath... the dark record of every sin we have ever committed washed away by the blood of Christ
- b. our place at the wedding banquet is included
- c. so also a fruitful, meaningful, blessed life here on earth
- d. included as well is the indwelling Spirit now, and the fullness of face to face fellowship later
- e. the Law will be written in our hearts, and our natures changed to delight in it

3. Highest of all... we shall gain Christ!!!

Philippians 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Philippians 3:8-11 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. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

This magnificent Christ... the delight of His heavenly Father, the greatest gift the Father could possibly have given us... Christ Himself shall be our portion and our inheritance... He shall be our treasure and our pleasure... He shall delight our eyes and fill our hearts, we shall feast on Him forever:

Revelation 1:13-16 "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. 15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

IV. On True Conversion: The Exclusive Joy of the Greatest Treasure

A. Two Great Drives in the Universe... Together at Last

1. John Piper: Massive impact on my life and ministry
2. Christianity is based on genuine affections... deep joy in God that drives out all others
3. Two great drives in the universe
 - a. God's intense desire to be glorified in His universe... that His name would be above all other names, that He would be above all magnified
 - b. Man's deep desire to be happy, joyful, content
4. Two are met in this one verse

vs. 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."

"IN HIS JOY" for gladness, out of ecstasy, this man gladly sells everything in the universe that He may have God Himself in the person of Christ!

Christianity is a religion of joy... of celebration...

God becomes our treasure and our pleasure, so powerful that all other competing treasures and pleasures are sold, driven away!!

B. Christian Hedonism's Signature Verse

1. Hedonism: living for pleasure, for joy
2. Christian hedonism: living for pleasure in God alone

"God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him!!"

C. True Conversion: One Joy Drives Out the Rest

1. Conversion is the radical transformation that must occur in you in order to be saved

"You must be born again."

2. Piper's new definition of conversion

Piper: "Conversion is what happens to the heart when Christ becomes for us a Treasure Chest of holy joy. Saving faith is the heartfelt conviction that Christ is both solidly reliable and supremely desirable. The newness of a Christian convert is a new spiritual taste for the glory of God."

3. If Christ is boring to you, if thoughts of heaven are unappealing, if the treasures of the Kingdom are of little interest to you... you are not converted!!

4. This joy is so great it begins to drive out all competing joys until it consumes everything!

➤ No one will be checking the score of the ballgame during the wedding banquet of the Lamb!!!!

➤ No one will be wondering how their Mutual Funds are doing while walking down the streets of the New Jerusalem!!

➤ Similarly here on earth, the perfection of conversion is to be totally consumed by the joy of knowing Christ! To realize there is nothing greater than knowing and being known by Christ

“All I once held dear, built my life upon, all this world reveres and wars to own, all I once thought gain I have counted loss, spent and worthless now compared to this: Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you... there is no greater thing!”

V. Application: What is Christ Worth to You?

1. Judgment Day Supply and Demand

Matthew 16:26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

SETTING THE PRICE:

Law of supply and demand: price goes up if there's a great demand and a low supply

On Judgment Day, salvation will be of infinite value because everyone who isn't saved will want it and be willing to give anything they possess for it, but none will be available!!!

2. Set Your Heart on Your Treasure

3. Let Joy Over Your Treasure Purify Lesser Joys

4. Fill Your Days and Your Speech Accordingly