

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 13 contains seven parables about the Kingdom of heaven. Today we're going to examine the short twin parables of the treasure buried in the field and the valuable pearl. As we talk about the Kingdom of heaven, you must remember only thing necessary for a kingdom is a King—and Jesus is that King. When you enthrone Jesus in your heart as ruler and king, then you are part of the Kingdom of heaven.

The title of this message is "Sell Out and Buy Up!" The Bible has a lot to say about being good stewards with God's money, and sometimes that involves making wise investment choices. Jesus told about 40 classic parables and 17 of them (43%) had to do with money and possessions. Do you know the name of the world's first financier? His name was Noah. He was floating his stock while everyone else was in liquidation! Or do you know who was the first investor in the Bible? It was Pharaoh's daughter. She went down to the bank of the Nile and drew out a little prophet—Moses.

What if I told you there was an investment you could make and your return would make you wealthy beyond your wildest dreams? Would you be interested? Of course, you'd probably be skeptical because we all know about Bernie Madoff and the other investment scammers out there with their "get-rich-quick schemes." But what if I could convince you this investment would really pay off a thousand-fold? How much would you be willing to invest? Would you invest just a little, or would you sell out everything you have and buy up all of that investment you could?

If you have a computer, you're familiar with Google. Google stock went public in August 2004. A friend told me about a man who was so convinced in the value of Google stock before the IPO, he liquidated all his assets, and even borrowed money to buy as many shares of Google stock as he could. He sold off his house, his cars, and all his personal possessions. He cleaned out his bank account and cashed in all his other investments to buy Google stock. He decided to sell out and buy up Google stock.

This man wasn't poor, but he wasn't rich. I don't know how much cash he was able to raise, but let's imagine from the sale of his house and his other assets he was able to scrape together \$250,000. Google shares started selling for \$85 a share and today they sell for about \$500 a share. His quarter million investment would be worth about \$1.5 million today. So some people would say he was smart to sell out and buy up.

Jesus is going to give us a hot tip on a life investment that is much better than Google, Apple, IBM, and Wal-Mart combined. There really IS an investment we can make that is worth selling out all we have and buying up all we can.

Matthew 13:44-46. Jesus said, "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. 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."

These two parables are similar because they both involved discovering something of great value. Jesus knew the human heart well enough to know it's exciting for us to even think about finding a buried treasure or a precious pearl. That's why people pan for gold today in the rivers of California. In East Texas, I think that's why so many people go to garage sales. We've all heard the true story of the man in Pennsylvania who paid \$4 for an old painting, only to discover inside the frame was the 25th copy of the original Declaration of Independence. It later sold for \$8.1 million.

I read a definition of a garage sale the other day: "A garage sale is when people spend \$20 on gas to drive their air conditioned cars around town for the privilege of standing in the hot sun and trying to get a \$4 lamp for \$3.25." Now we have cyber-garage sales. You've heard it said, "One man's junk is another man's treasure." Today, "one man's junk is another man's eBay sale!"

These are twin parables but they aren't identical twins. In the parable of the hidden treasure, the finder wasn't looking for treasure, he came upon it accidentally. But in the parable of the pearl, the merchant was diligently searching for just such a pearl. I believe these two parables represent two different ways people come into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

1. BURIED TREASURE: Some people stumble over the truth of God's Kingdom

Finding treasure buried under the ground in Israel isn't far fetched—it's still happening. Wherever they dig, they find archeological treasures. Back in the time of Jesus people didn't have banks with vaults, so it was very common to bury your valuables in the ground. (Some people today store cash in their freezer or stuff it inside a mattress.) This adds a little meaning to the parable of the three stewards. Remember, one of them said he took the Master's money and buried it in a field. That was their way of trying to ensure the money was safe.

Since Israel had seen hundreds of generations come and go, it isn't too hard to imagine a man digging in a field to plant some wheat and his hoe hits something metal. He quickly uncovers it and sees it is a fortune. But rather than stealing it, he buries it quickly, and then he goes and liquidates all of his assets and buys the entire field. There is no evidence this man was looking for treasure. He was stumbled onto the treasure. This represents the fact that some people come into the kingdom almost by surprise. They weren't even looking for God, but God found them.

The Apostle Paul is a prime example of this. His name was Saul before he became a Christian. He wasn't searching for Jesus. In fact, he was on the way to arrest Christians. But on the road to Damascus, he stumbled on the greatest treasure he would ever find: He met Jesus. Through the years, I've heard people say, "I wasn't looking for God when He found me."

Let me give you a modern example of this process. Astronaut Charles Duke is one of only twelve men who have left footprints on the moon. He was the lunar module pilot for the Apollo 16 Mission. He now lives in New Braunfels, Texas. He wasn't a Christian when he walked on the moon. Here's his story: "After walking on the moon, I was bored. Fame, fortune, a spot in the history books: I had it all. But if you had been a fly on the wall in my home, you would have seen that I wasn't so hot. I was failing miserably as a husband and father. Though I had gone to church all my life, I had all of God I needed in that one hour every Sunday morning. Even the

moon had not been a spiritual experience. I wasn't looking for God. I only knew Jesus the way you know the U.S. Presidents—in name only. My business succeeded, and the money rolled in, but I was bored again. But Dottie wasn't. She had changed. Her depression had lifted, and she demonstrated a new, believing faith. She turned to God—not me—for answers to her problems. One night I attended a Bible Study with her that focused on one penetrating question, "Who was Jesus?" All my life I had said the words, "Son of God," but had never trusted Him. That night I came face-to-face with the opportunity to follow Him. I prayed with Dottie in the front seat of our car and gave my life over to Christ. I didn't see angels. I didn't hear music. No blinding lights. But I knew what I knew. I was real. The next day I awoke with an insatiable desire to read the Bible. It cost the government \$400 million for me to walk three days on the moon—and it's over. But to walk with Jesus is free and it lasts forever!"

Maybe you're here today for your weekly hour-long dose of God. I want to assure you there is so much more. This could be God's wake up call to you! He is saying, "Wake up! There's more to knowing Me than warming a pew every few Sundays." He wants you to discover the truth that His Kingdom is the most valuable thing in your life!

2. THE PRICELESS PEARL: Some people find the truth of God's Kingdom after searching diligently

This parable is the source of the phrase "the pearl of great price," which is how it is translated in the King James Version. Sadly, the phrase "Pearl of Great Price" is also the name of a book written by Mormon founder, Joseph Smith. It contains his rambling prophecies and Mormons consider it as inspired as the Bible and the Book of Mormon. But the Pearl of Great price isn't a book by a Mormon; the Pearl of Great Price is Jesus.

A pearl is the only precious gem man doesn't create. Diamonds, rubies, and emeralds are rough crystals and a craftsman must cut and polish them. But a pearl can't be cut. A pearl comes as a result of suffering. A little piece of sand or other irritant gets into an oyster or clam and as the oyster coats that irritant with a substance called nacre (nay-ker). As the oyster continually covers the source of pain with nacre, the result is a beautiful pearl. The pearl is the only gem that comes from a living creature. It's easy to apply this to Jesus. He is alive and it was through His suffering that value was added to our relationship with Him.

So, the obvious difference between the hidden treasure and the pearl is that the merchant was diligently looking for that one pearl that was perfect enough to buy. And there are many people who enter the Kingdom of heaven after diligently searching for truth. One example in the Bible of this was the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. He was a government official from Africa who was seeking spiritual truth. He came from a pagan culture, but he believed in one God, so he traveled all the way to Jerusalem to learn more about this One True God. He was traveling back to Africa across the desert and he still wasn't satisfied. But God sent Phillip to rendezvous with him. The Ethiopian was reading the scroll of Isaiah in his chariot when Phillip met him. Phillip explained to him that Jesus Christ was the answer to his search for truth. That day the Ethiopian found his pearl of great price and he was so excited, they stopped by an oasis and he was baptized. Then he went on his way rejoicing. He was search for truth, and his search led him to Jesus.

Today, there are plenty of people searching for the truth about God just like that African official.

Lee Strobel was an atheist and a legal journalist for the Chicago Tribune. His wife was an agnostic, but one day she came home and told him she had become a follower of Jesus. He thought she would start acting weird but instead he noticed a positive change in her. Here's Lee's story in his own words: "Her changes made me curious, so I went to church with her to help her get out of this dangerous cult. That day I heard the gospel for the first time. I still walked out an atheist, but I thought, 'If this is true, then it has huge implications for my life.' So I used my journalism training to begin a detailed investigation to see if there was any credibility to Christianity or to any other World Religion. I did that for a year and nine months until November 8, 1981. On that day I realized that in light of the torrent of evidence flowing in the direction of the proof of Christianity, that it would take more faith to remain in atheism than to become a Christian. To remain an atheist I would have to swim upstream against this torrent of evidence about Jesus. So on that day I received Jesus Christ as my forgiver and my leader. My values, my character, and my purpose of living began to change over time. I was transformed in a way that, as I look back now, I can't imagine staying on the path I was on compared to the adventure, the fulfillment, and the joy of following Jesus Christ." (www.leestrobel.com)

Some people come to Christ when they stumble over the truth, and others enter the Kingdom after searching for years and years. As I often say, there is a miracle in every parable, because God has a miraculous message for us in these twin parables. Let's look at three personal lessons we can apply to our lives.

PERSONAL LESSON #1: Knowing Jesus is the most valuable discovery you'll ever make

During the Middle Ages, many of the leaders of the Catholic Church believed the Kingdom of Heaven was the Holy Roman Empire where the Pope dictated to Kings how their countries should be operated. Even today, the Vatican is considered a sovereign country and the U.S. has an ambassador to the Vatican just as we have an ambassador to China.

But the Kingdom of Heaven was never intended to be a religion or a government. The Kingdom of heaven is having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is knowing Jesus. Paul mentioned this many times in his letters. For instance he wrote, "I want to KNOW Christ, and the power of his resurrection..." (Philippians 3:10).

Have you made that discovery yet? Our faith is not about keeping rules or following rituals it is about knowing God and loving God with every part of our being. And once we know God and love God, then we will love our neighbors as ourselves. This is the treasure in the field and the Pearl of Great Price.

In 1940, the RMS Niagara hit a German mine and sank off the coast of New Zealand. Years later, a salvage team located the wreck and after cutting a hole in the side of the ship, they recovered 8 tons of gold. Gold is selling for \$1,200 an ounce now, so that amount of gold would be worth a staggering \$320 million today. Well, there is something much more valuable than tons of gold hidden in the pages of this Book. It is that you can have a personal relationship with your Creator. Have you discovered this yet?

PERSONAL LESSON #2: The benefits of knowing Jesus are worth any sacrifice

In both parables, the men sold all they had in order to buy the field and the pearl. Jesus tells us we must be willing to forsake everything else in life in order to be His disciple. Salvation is free, but as the title of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book says, there is the cost of discipleship. Jesus wants all that you are and all that you have. A.W. Tozer used to say, "It doesn't take much of a man to be a Christian, but it takes all there is of him."

Before he discovered the treasure of knowing Jesus, Paul was a highly educated, respected Jew. He was proud of the fact that he was of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee, and religiously perfect. But he gladly surrendered all of his respectability and personal accomplishments in order to know Jesus. He wrote, "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." (Philippians 3:7-8)

But when you willingly give Jesus all that you are and all that you have, you receive so much more in return. I heard a story once about a group of guys who were returning from playing golf in rural Georgia. As they drove down a two-lane road they came up on a smoldering house. It was obvious it had burned during the night. Standing in front of the smoldering ashes was a distraught woman with a small child. The men were Christians, so they stopped the car and asked if she was okay. She said nobody was hurt but she had lost all she had. The men each pulled a few dollars out of their pockets and handed it to the woman and said, "God bless you." They drove off in silence. After a couple of miles the driver stopped the car and took off his golf hat. He turned to his buddies and said, "Okay, take out your wallets and give me all the money you have and we're going to go back and give it to her." They emptied their wallets and one man even wrote a large check. The amount in the hat totaled over \$1,000.

When they returned, they found the woman standing in the same place. The driver got out and said to the woman, "We just gave you some money, but we made a mistake. Would you be willing to give me all that money back?" The woman looked at him as if he was crazy, but without complaining she gave him the few dollars they had given her. The driver then added that money to that inside his hat and handed her the whole hat. Then he said, "We'll be sending you more." What a great picture of the fulfillment of this parable. God asks us to give Him all we have—and we don't have that much—and what we have He gave to us in the first place. But when we willingly surrender everything to Him, He pours out so much blessing we can't even contain it all!

PERSONAL LESSON #3: Living in a relationship with Jesus produces real joy

In the parable of the buried treasure Jesus said the man joyfully gave all he had to buy the field. It wasn't a sad choice; it was a joyful decision. People are searching in a lot of different places trying to find happiness and satisfaction. But true joy and satisfaction is found only in a relationship with Jesus. The Psalmist wrote, "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." (Psalm 16:11)

I have shared my testimony many times, so most of you know my story. I grew up in LA (lower Alabama) and was taken to church from the time I was born. I became a Christian when I was nine by putting my faith and trust in Jesus. I didn't know much about the Christian life, I just knew that Jesus loved me and that he died for my sins. I love to see children put their faith in Jesus. We shouldn't expect a third grader to comprehend all the theological implications of our faith in order to trust Jesus. Salvation can be entered by simple, child-like trust. In fact, Jesus once told some religious adults that unless they became as little children they wouldn't enter the Kingdom of heaven.

But my testimony is like many of yours in that I really had a two-step conversion. Instead of the Texas two-step, it was the Alabama two-step, though. During my early teens I lived a fairly inconsistent Christian life. There were ups and downs, but mostly downs. But when I was seventeen, I came to understand the true value of a relationship with Jesus. That was the first time I fully realized that living for Jesus was worth investing all I was and all I had. That was the time I found the treasure buried in the field. That was the time I finally found the pearl of great price. And on that evening, June 24, 1970 I said, "Here, Lord. I give you everything. Take ALL my life." You might say that's when I crowned Jesus as the permanent King and Lord of my life. That's also when God gave me my life verse, Matthew 6:33, "Seek first HIS kingdom and HIS righteousness, and all these things will be given to you." It's been a great adventure, and I can tell that it has been a journey of joy every step of the way.

Maybe you've been a Christian for many years, but have you truly discovered just how valuable living 100%, 24/7 for Jesus really is? You find real joy when you make that discovery.

CONCLUSION

Have you discovered that Jesus is the hidden treasure, even when you weren't searching? Have you discovered Jesus is the pearl of great price and He is the answer you'll find at the end of your search?

My friend, Tom Mullins is pastor of Christ Fellowship in West Palm Beach, Florida. A few weeks ago, Tamara Lowe, a motivational speaker was at his church. She shared a great rap about how people are searching for the truth. You can search for it on YouTube to watch her share it, but here's what she said: "To be a survivor in this amazing race; with a need for speed you need God's grace; cause if you're desperate like housewives watching days of our lives; you can't cope with out hope; and that's not on a rope; If you're looking to Oprah or Dr. Phil; you can shop non-stop or pop a pill; but the void won't fill; and the pain won't kill; 'till you love the One who hung on a hill; Kicking back in your lazy-boy, easy chair; watching who wants to be a millionaire; Nah, you're not gonna' find it there; No American idol or council tribal has a final answer that'll satisfy you; CSI ain't got a clue; SVU don't know what to do; Not the ER or the OC; nothing on CD,TV, DVD or Mp3 can save you and me; CNN's got no good news; Here's a headline: you must choose; It's not a simple life, Paris Hilton; it's treadin' on thin ice living in sin; you can be an apprentice for Donald Trump or eat fear factor fast food from a dump; you can be a heavy hitter; or wheel of fortune winner; a fox news no-spin spinner; or flat out sinner; but you'd better check this life that you're livin; and make sure your sins are forgiven; I'll bet you

fifty cent Elvis done came and went; and eventually every black-eyed pea, Gwen Stephani, P-diddy and Brittany, every wanna-be in MTV with their icy bling; every Dixie chick that sings; they ALL gonna' see the King of Kings. I don't care if you're J-Lo, Leno, or Bono; one thing that you gotta' know: some day you're gonna' die, bro; then where you gonna' go? Hey, I'm not talking some punk junk that's irrelevant like you're grandma's church from way back when; it's not some preacher feature on tv that you need to be likin' or listenin; the real superstar is Jesus Christ; He's the way; He's the truth; He's the life. One day He's gonna' split the sky; He's the brightest light and the highest high; So what I came to say and what I'm telling you; is don't buy that stupid stuff they been selling you; It's all designed to fill your head and waste your space until you're dead; Here's the bottom line in my rhyme: Give your life to God while there's still time."

OUTLINE

1. BURIED TREASURE: Some people stumble over the truth of God's Kingdom
2. THE PRICELESS PEARL: Some people find the truth of God's Kingdom after searching diligently

PERSONAL LESSONS

1. Knowing Jesus is the most valuable discovery you'll ever make

"I want to KNOW Christ, and the power of his resurrection..." *Philippians 3:10*

2. The benefits of knowing Jesus are worth any sacrifice

"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." *Philippians 3:7-8*

3. Living in a relationship with Jesus produces real joy

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes