

"Secrets of the Kingdom"

"Pearl of Great Price"

Matthew 13:45, 46

Big Idea – The Kingdom of heaven is worth everything.

Matthew 13:45 "Also, the kingdom of heaven is like a man looking for fine pearls.

46 When he found a very valuable pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it.

The great value of pearls in Jesus' day

An emporos (merchant) was a wholesale dealer, whose business was to buy and resell merchandise. He would travel about the country, perhaps to different countries, looking for items to buy and then sell for a profit. This particular merchant spent his time seeking fine pearls. He probably made regular visits to the various coastal areas where pearls were harvested, and haggled with the divers or their employers over prices. Diving for pearls was extremely hazardous, and many divers lost their lives or ruined their health in obtaining the oysters that contained the beautiful gems. That fact, in addition to their scarcity and natural beauty, made pearls extremely precious.

Pearls were the most highly valued gems in the ancient world and were often bought as investments, much as diamonds are today. In the form of pearls, a great amount of wealth could be kept in a small space—concealed in one's clothing while traveling or buried in a field for safekeeping, like the "hidden" treasure of the previous parable.

The Jewish Talmud spoke of pearls as being beyond price, and some Egyptians and Romans held the pearl in such awe that they worshiped it. When Jesus warned against believers casting their pearls before swine (Matt. 7:6), He was emphasizing the priceless value of the gospel and its attendant truths, which unbelievers disdain as worthless.

In John's vision of the New Jerusalem, the city had twelve pearl gates, and *"each one of the gates was a single pearl" Rev. 21:21.*

Adorning their heads with "gold or pearls" apparently was a common practice among both Jewish and Gentile women (see 1 Tim. 2:9). In fact, the wife of the Roman emperor Caligula often wore a vast fortune in pearls in her hair and on her ears, neck, wrists, and fingers. Cleopatra is said to have owned two extremely valuable pearls, each of which would be worth several million dollars in today's market.

When this merchant came across one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it. Obviously, the merchant considered that particular pearl to have been worth more than all his other pearls together, because they would have been included in the sale of all that he had.

Because the emphasis of these parables is personal appropriation of the kingdom of heaven, the message is obviously one of salvation. In this context, the kingdom of heaven represents the saving knowledge of God through trust in His Son and all the benefits and glory that relationship brings.

Lessons we can learn about the Kingdom of Heaven

1. The Kingdom must be personally entered.

You can't get it by birth, like you become a member of a parents' race or a citizen of their country.

Every human being is under God's dominion in the sense that he lives on the earth—which is under the Lord's ultimate control, in spite of Satan's temporary and limited power over it.

So, an unbeliever who associates with believers can benefit from many blessings of the kingdom because of that association.

However, although an unbeliever may attend an evangelical church, enjoy Bible preaching, and be a professing and baptized member of a church, he is not a citizen of the kingdom.

Jesus said such superficial and non-genuine *"sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness," where "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" Matthew 8:12.*

Paul reminded his Jewish brothers, *"They are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants" Romans 9:6-7*

Under the Old Covenant a person could be a Jew racially, nationally, and religiously—fully identified with God's chosen people outwardly—and yet have no part in the true, spiritual Israel.

In the same way today, a person can be born into a family who traces its church membership back for many generations, and yet have no part in Christ's true church. Even though it gives many advantages, even being born into a family of godly believers does not make a person a Christian.

To be saved, he must make his own decision to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Remember Jesus' words to Nicodemus?

"Unless a man is born again (born from above), he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3

2. The Kingdom is priceless.

A major diamond mining company in South Africa specializes in mining certain coastal areas where the rough gems have been deposited below some fifty or so feet of stone, gravel, and sand.

After giant earth movers remove the cover layers, the diamond-bearing conglomerate is dynamited and then excavated by hydraulic water pressure. Using large nylon brushes, workers sweep out all the crevices and hollows to be sure nothing is lost. The loosened conglomerate is then pounded, crushed, washed, and sifted to discover every possible diamond. It is estimated that some 180 million parts of earth are processed to yield one part diamond.

For all the efforts taken to find, mine, refine, cut, polish, mount, sell, and buy precious stones and metals, none of them offers anything truly worthwhile or lasting.

They cannot heal a broken relationship, give peace to a troubled mind, or forgive a sinful heart. They offer little for the present and nothing for the future.

"But where can wisdom be found?" Job asks. "And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know its value, nor is it found in the land of the living. The deep says, 'It is not in me'; and the sea says, 'It is not with me.' Pure gold cannot be given in exchange for it, nor can silver be weighed as its price.... Thus it is hidden from the eyes of all living.... God understands its way; and He knows its place.... And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding'" (Job 28:12-15, 21, 23, 28).

Speaking of the great worth of the kingdom of heaven, the nineteenth-century Scottish preacher Thomas Guthrie wrote, "In the blood of Christ to wash out sin's darkest stains, in the grace of God to purify the foulest heart, in peace to calm life's roughest storms, in hopes to cheer guilt's darkest hour, in a courage that defies death and descends calmly into the tomb, in that which makes the poorest rich and without which the richest are poor indeed, the gospel 'has treasures greater far than east or west unfold, and its rewards more precious are than all the stores of gold'"

(Thomas Guthrie, *The Parables* [London: Alexander Strahan, 1866], p.213).

There is absolutely nothing to compare to it in worth and beauty,

1 Peter 1:4 and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay.

2:7 Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious...

It is forgiveness, love, peace, happiness, virtue, purity, righteousness, eternal life, glory, and more.

When Robert Herbert Thompson—who owned 180 newspapers, controlled 290 other companies, and was personally worth more than 300 million dollars—was asked how much he would give to buy the New York Times newspaper, he is said to have replied, "I'd mortgage my soul." Many people would do just that in order to achieve the possessions, fame, or power for which they lust.

The value of God's kingdom far exceeds that of all earthly riches and advantages together—and would still exceed them in worth even if they brought the satisfaction they promise.

And God offers His priceless kingdom to any person, no matter how poor, how insignificant, how sinful, who trusts in Christ. The price is the same for everyone—all they have.

Matthew 16:24 "Jesus said, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.'"

3. The Kingdom is not superficially visible.

When Jesus was "questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!"' (Luke 17:20-21).

The kingdom will not be observable until Jesus returns and establishes His millennial rule over the earth. At that time He *"is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels," and men will "see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom"* (Matt. 16:27-28).

But the present kingdom "is not of this world" John 18:36.

"A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God," Paul tells us; "for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Cor. 2:14). In his next letter to Corinth the apostle further explains

"the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4).

Even when the truth of the gospel is clearly presented to him, the natural man cannot see it. He is completely content to seek his temporary pleasures and things which can never satisfy, considering the trinkets of the world to be of great value and the gospel of salvation to be worthless.

The treasure of salvation is not obvious to men, and it is therefore not something they naturally seek.

The full value of a pearl may not be evident to the average person, who may admire its beauty yet be unaware of its priceless nature. Many people have passing admiration for Jesus and the gospel but are totally unaware of the supreme and priceless gift that could be theirs in belonging to Him. They see the pearl in plain view, but to their worldly eyes it has little worth.

Jesus "...was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him" John 1:9

4. The Kingdom is the source of true joy.

from joy the man sold all he had in order to buy the field that held the priceless treasure.

Joy is a basic desire in every human being and is the desire that all the others either directly or indirectly serve. We like to eat because food brings joy and satisfaction to our palate and a good feeling and health to our bodies.

The desire for money is primarily based in the joy we hope to find in the things money can buy. Fame, power, knowledge, and all other things we long after are desired for the joy it is hoped they will bring. Even the miser, who seems to love money for its own sake, hoards his possessions for the joy the hoarding brings. Some people thrive on misery, because they find joy in feeling sorry for themselves.

Yet all of those joys are temporary and disappointing. The only true and eternal joy is the joy found in Christ and His kingdom, because man was made by God for Himself. Human satisfaction can be found only in God's divine provision.

After Jesus told His disciples to abide in Him and to have His words abide in them, to prove their true discipleship by bearing much fruit, He said,

"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" John 15:11

A short while later in the same discourse He said, *"Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full" 16:24.*

John declares,

"These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete" 1 John 1:4

the apostle Paul tells us:

"the kingdom of God is... peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17); in the benediction of that letter he prays for his readers,

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (15:13).

True joy comes only in the discovery and appropriation of Christ and His kingdom through trust in Him.

5. The Kingdom may be entered from different situations.

A person does not have to become anything else before he becomes a Christian, and he can come from wherever he may be.

The two parables are much alike in that the main character in each is a man who discovers something of extreme value and sacrifices everything he owns to buy it. But the ways in which they come across their precious treasures are vastly different, almost opposite.

In the course of going about his normal business of earning a living, the first man was working in the field or perhaps passing through it on a journey. Finding a treasure was the last thing on his mind.

In a similar way, many people come across the gospel while pursuing the activities of their daily life, with no expectation or concern for salvation or anything else spiritual.

While busily occupied with earning a living, caring for a family, getting an education, or building a career, they hear a sermon, read a book, listen to a tape, or have a conversation that presents the gracious claims and promises of Christ. By the Spirit's gracious power they recognize the priceless value of the message, and they believe, are saved, and inherit the kingdom.

That is what happened to Paul. His experience was unique in that it was a dramatic, awesome, and audible encounter with the risen Christ and in that he was called to be an apostle. But it was not unique in the fact that trusting Christ as Lord and Savior was not his intention. He was, in fact, in the midst of zealously persecuting those who trusted in Christ.

In the nearly two millennia since then, millions of others have been convicted and converted by the power of God while in the midst of a life of denying and opposing Him. Some have come to church or to an evangelistic meeting to mock the preacher or ridicule the gospel and left a child of the kingdom.

The woman at the well near Sychar had come there simply to draw water and go on about her chores, but she encountered the Source of living water, went home redeemed, and led many others to redemption (John 4:5-42).

The blind beggar in Jerusalem whom Jesus healed by applying clay to the man's eyes and having him wash in the Pool of Silo did not even know who Jesus was—much less ask Him for healing and still less for salvation. But he was healed immediately and eventually received salvation as well (John 9:1-38).

Charles Haddon Spurgeon grew up in a Christian home, but as a boy he attended church only because it was the proper thing to do. He was not immoral or rebellious but was basically satisfied with his life and was not seeking any more religion than he had. One New Year's morning, when he was fifteen years old, he decided he ought to attend the service at his church. When the snow and cold wind became too

fierce for him, he ducked into a little storefront type of church, as much to get out of the cold as anything.

"When I could go no further," he writes of the event, "I turned down a court and came to a little Primitive Methodist church. The preacher who was to have conducted the service never got there because he was held up by the weather, and quickly one of the officers had to be brought forward to conduct the service with the congregation of perhaps fifteen people. The man was really stupid. His text was, 'Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.' And he just kept repeating it because he had nothing else to say." But something about Spurgeon caught the man's eye, and he said, "Young man, you look very miserable. And miserable in life and miserable in death you will be if you don't obey my text." He then shouted, "Young man, look to Jesus! Look, look, look!" "I looked," said Spurgeon; "and then and there the cloud was gone and the darkness rolled away and that moment I saw the Son."

Like Paul, the woman of Sychar, the beggar in Jerusalem, and countless others, Spurgeon was looking for nothing but found everything.

The second parable, however, depicts a man whose life business was searching for the thing he eventually found. He represents the seeker after God who for years looks everywhere for meaning and purpose in life, trying one religion or philosophy and then another. He finds nothing that satisfies but believes that the true way is out there if he can only find it, and he never stops looking.

That was the experience of the Ethiopian eunuch whom the Holy Spirit led Philip to intercept on the road to Gaza. When Philip explained that Isaiah was writing about Christ, the Savior, the Ethiopian immediately believed. His long quest was ended, and he "went on his way rejoicing" Acts 8:26-39.

Another Gentile, Cornelius, was also a God-fearing proselyte, who "gave many alms to the Jewish people, and prayed to God continually." God honored his sincere seeking by sending Peter to explain the gospel and lead him and his household to salvation (Acts 10).

Also, the Gentile Lydia (Acts 16:14-15) and both Jewish and Greek worshipers in the synagogue at Berea (17:11) sought and found the Lord.

Acts 17:11b "The Bereans were eager to hear what Paul and Silas said and studied the Scriptures every day to find out if these things were true."

6. The Kingdom is made personal by a transaction.

In both parables the priceless object was bought at the expense of every possession the finder owned. For that reason some Christians feel uncomfortable about these parables, because they seem to teach that salvation can be bought.

Yet from beginning to end, Scripture makes abundantly clear that salvation is totally the free gift of God. Yet interpreted in the right way, salvation is bought in the sense that the person who accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior surrenders everything he has to Him.

In all parables, the physical and earthly is used to illustrate the spiritual and heavenly. In these two parables the economic transaction of buying represents the spiritual transaction of surrender. There is an exchange in salvation. The old is exchanged for the new.

A familiar Old Testament passage that speaks of salvation as the free gift of God uses the expression "come, buy" twice in one verse.

"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters," Isaiah wrote, "and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost" Isaiah 55:1

The buying is not with money or any other possessions, material or otherwise.

But in this passage, just as in the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price, a transaction is clear. The sinner gives up all the worthless things he has while freely receiving all the priceless things God has to give in Christ.

What we give up in no way pays for salvation. To the contrary, what we give up not only is worthless but worse than worthless.

Even the "righteous deeds" of an unbeliever "are like a filthy garment" Isa. 64:6.

In eagerness to defend one truth of the gospel, it is possible to contradict or compromise another. In order to defend the freeness of the gospel, some interpreters deny or underplay the cost of salvation to believers as well as to Christ. Only Christ's payment purchases salvation, but the true believer will also be willing to pay whatever cost salvation involves. Without the willingness to yield all he has, a person's profession of faith is hollow and worthless.

The rich young ruler of Matthew 19:16-22 is the classic example of one who saw the value of the pearl but refused to submit all he was and had to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Surrender is not a human work to gain salvation but a part of the saving work of God wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit.

Surrender of possessions cannot buy salvation. They have no spiritual merit and are of no value to God. Surrender is necessary not because it can buy anything but because it is inevitable when salvation is truly sought. Salvation that is not desired above everything else is not truly desired. Salvation costs nothing in the sense of payment but everything in the sense of surrender.

"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me," Jesus said, "and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:37-39).

Speaking of coming to Him for salvation, Jesus said,

For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish." Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace. So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. (Luke 14:28-33)

Jesus could not have made clearer the truth that the person who will not surrender his old life will never have the new.

Some of men's most cherished possessions are their sins; and these must certainly be surrendered, because it is from sin that Christ saves us. No one can come to Christ by stopping his sinning but the one who truly belongs to Him will long to give up those sins and every other.

This is the attitude taught by Jesus in the Beatitudes—poverty of spirit that recognizes the bankruptcy of all human resources, mourning over sin, meekness in the presence of God, and hunger and thirst for righteousness in exchange for sin and guilt. God's sovereign, saving work incorporates that response.

In his letter to the church at Philippi, Paul recounts his many personal advantages and achievements before he was saved.

I was "circumcised the eighth day," he says, "of the nation 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 the righteousness which is in the Law found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me," he continues to explain, "I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ" (Phil. 3:5-7).

Paul staunchly defends the freeness of salvation, yet he testifies that, in coming to Christ, he counted as loss—that is, he willingly surrendered as worthless—everything he was and had.

Like the men who bought the treasure in the field and the pearl of great value, he liquidated everything he had for the priceless Treasure he had discovered.

Big Idea – The Kingdom of heaven is worth everything.

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me"
Matthew 16:24