

This morning is the fourth week in my new sermon series Masterclass: Storyteller, in which I am looking at the parables of Jesus, the stories that He told, and what we can learn from them about what it means to know and follow God. If you're unfamiliar with the term parable, the best definition I have found comes from Pastor John MacArthur: **A parable is an ingeniously simple word picture illuminating a profound spiritual lesson.** Jesus often taught in parables, using word pictures like "God's kingdom is like a seed" or "God is like a Father welcoming home a wayward Son." By using everyday language that was familiar to his audience, he ensured that the stories would stay with them long after he left. But he also used parables because the way they were told would cause the self-righteous and sophisticated to reject his teaching as basic, completely missing the deeper spiritual truth hidden in the story, while those with childlike faith would respond to Jesus and want to know Him better.

This morning, we are going to be looking at the shortest of all Jesus' parables, which is found in Matthew 13:44-46:

Matthew 13:44-46 - *"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**.⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it*

Throughout his teaching career, Jesus never actually gives a definition for the kingdom of heaven, but he tells many parables that describe what it is like. If I had to define it, I would say that the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God is wherever God is King. It is wherever Jesus is Lord. It includes all that is in a right relationship with God. In these short parables, he compares the kingdom of heaven to a treasure hidden in a field and a merchant looking for fine pearls.

Let me share three things that we learn from this passage about knowing God.

1) **The kingdom of God is not easily found**

In each parable, the kingdom of God is not easily found. In the first, it is hidden; and in the second, it must be sought for. In the first comparison, a man comes upon it by accident. He is doing something in the field, maybe plowing or some other sort of work, and discovers the treasure. In the second comparison, a merchant is searching for fine pearls and eventually finds the one of great price.

The kingdom of God is not easily found. Sometimes people find it by accident, and sometimes people find it while searching for it. When you read through the Bible, you see a similar pattern. Some come upon the treasure of God's kingdom when they are not looking for it. Think of the woman at the well, going there for water and meeting Jesus instead. Think of Paul on the way to Damascus to arrest Christians, but instead blinded by Jesus, who turns his life around. They were looking for something other than Jesus, but that is who they found.

Others, however, are searching for God, and eventually find him. Think of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, reading Isaiah 53 and hoping someone will explain it to him. Think of Cornelius in Acts 10, seeking God and finding him as Peter tells him about Jesus and baptizes him.

For those of you who know God, you may have a story more like the woman at the well, or maybe one like the Ethiopian eunuch. Some of you were not even looking for God, and suddenly stumbled across Him like finding buried treasure. That was my story. Others were searching for God, trying to understand who Jesus was, and He revealed Himself to you.

We come to God in different ways, but either way, the kingdom is hidden; it is not entirely visible. And there is a reason for this. Listen to what Paul says:

***2 Corinthians 4:4** - The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

***1 Corinthians 2:14** - The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

We are spiritually blind, unable to see the kingdom of heaven until we have His Holy Spirit. As Jesus said:

***John 3:3** - In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."*

Be assured that if you do not see knowing God as a great treasure, then you are still in some ways spiritually blind.

2) Knowing God is the greatest of all treasures

Some of you may remember a story out of California from six years ago about a couple who was out walking their dog on their property and saw a container sticking out of the ground, and when they unearthed the container along with a number of others, they found 1427 gold coins, dating from 1847 to 1894, all in mint condition, a haul that was worth about \$10 million.

In this parable, the man finds a treasure on a property that does not belong to him, and after burying it again, sells everything he owns to buy the property so that the buried treasure will be his. And in the second parable, the man looks for the most valuable pearl he can find and finally finds it, and sells all he owns to buy it.

Jesus is making the point that knowing and being known by God, being in a right relationship with Him, being a part of His kingdom and under His lordship, is THE treasure above all other treasures. Do you believe this? Let me attempt to do justice to why this is so:

- **Forgiveness of sins** – you are declared not guilty. Everything you have ever done wrong or ever will do wrong is wiped away. God will not hold the sin against you. There is an unlimited supply of grace, and no condemnation

***Romans 8:1-2** - Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*

- **Removal of shame** – The sense that there is something fundamentally wrong with you, that you are bad, is removed as God calls you His beloved child

***Romans 10:9-11** - That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. ¹¹ As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to **shame**."*

- **God's power to change** – His Holy Spirit empowering you to overcome any addiction or challenge as you submit to Him

***Ephesians 1:18-20** - I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great **power** for us who believe. That **power** is **like the working** of his mighty strength, ²⁰ which he exerted*

in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,

- **Purpose in life** – you know that you were created by God for a purpose and that everything you do for Him matters eternally

***Ephesians 2:10** - For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

***1 Corinthians 15:58** Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

- **Meaning in suffering** – you know that God is at work making you more like Him, or using it to prepare you to better minister to others

***Romans 8:28** - And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

- **Joy and peace** that is not contingent upon your circumstances – it is located in God, not in the things of this world. Nothing can touch that joy or peace.

***John 15:11** - I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*

***Philippians 4:6-7** - Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

- **Hope for the future** – you know that God is always working everything together for good, and that beyond the grave is perfect life everlasting

***1 Peter 1:3-4** - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you,*

- **Eternal life** – the promise of eternity. You do not need to fear death, because you know that there will be no more suffering, no more crying, no more pain, and no more death. All your heart's desires will be forever satisfied

Revelation 21:3-4 - *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

- **Eternal glory** – We will share in His glory, be celebrated and honored

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 - *But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to this through our gospel, that you might **share in the glory** of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

- **Perfect family & community** – a family that is as diverse as possible, where people from every ethnic group and culture live together in harmony

Revelation 7:9 - *After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from **every** nation, **tribe**, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.*

- **Perfect love that never leaves** – one who sees you and knows you and loves you enough to die for you and will never ever leave you

Romans 8:38-39 - *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

What is more, is that all of this is ours by virtue of Jesus' death on the cross for us. He paid it all, and it is ours if we will only turn from our sinful self-centered ways and trust in Him.

John 3:16 - *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Ephesians 2:8-9 - *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.*

This is the treasure that it is the kingdom of God, and so much more. Take the time to appraise this treasure until your attitude towards it is the same as the people in these parables that Jesus is telling..

3) God is worth everything we have

Do you see knowing God and being in a right relationship with Him as the treasure above all other treasures? You know you have found it and appraised it when there is nothing you would hold back, nothing you would not give up. The more you know God, the more He becomes a treasure, and the more you realize that there is nothing you can give up that He will not replace with something better, with more of His presence, His peace, His joy, His glory, His love. And as you gain more of Him, you will find that whatever it was you were looking for was not found in the things of this world but was found in Him all along.

Jesus makes the point in this parable that knowing God is like living near a barren field that costs \$100,000. It would cost you everything you own to get it, so you have no interest. But then you learn that there is millions of dollars of treasure hidden in that field. Suddenly that 100,000 seems like nothing at all to give up – in fact, you are eager to do it. And so you sell all you have to raise the money to buy that field, knowing that you will be a millionaire.

That is what it means to know and worship God. When you see Jesus as the treasure that He is, over time you come to realize that there is nothing that you would not give up for more of Him. Your money is his. Your time is his. Your sexuality is his. Your dreams are his. Your past is His. Your relationships are his. That is worship – realizing that everything your heart has desired is in Him, and being willing to lay everything else down so that you might have more of Him.

Thomas Chalmers put it this way: *“No one changes a habit just by trying – ‘oh, I shouldn’t be like that.’ The only way to dispossess an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new affection.”* His point is that the more that you appraise Jesus as the treasure, the more your desires and attitudes and behaviors change, because He becomes your primary affection, and knowing Him becomes your number one goal. One of the great phrases I’ve heard about what it means to come into a relationship with Jesus is this: **I’ve been seized by the power of a great affection.**

So what is it that He is calling you to sell, to surrender, to lay down today, so that you might have more of the true treasure? The truth is that there is nothing you can give up for God that He will not replace with something better: more of His

presence, His blessing, His power, His protection, His joy, His peace, and His love.

If you choose to give up **social standing and the acceptance of the crowd** out of a desire to honor and obey Him, the world may reject you but He will strengthen you, and you will find that His acceptance is enough. If you give up **money** by deciding to tithe and be generous and live on less, you may have less money and fewer possessions, but you will find that His presence gives you greater peace than you ever had when you were rich. You may give up **unhealthy relationships**, and as a result you may have less immediate companionship, but you will find that His presence gives you more love and joy than any earthly relationship ever could. You may give up **earthly pleasures and entertainment**, and so maybe you will be a little more out of touch with what is going on in the world, but you will find that nothing compares to the joy and satisfaction of the presence of God.

CS Lewis - *“We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who goes on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are too easily pleased.”*

Salvation is a free gift, but once you know God, you find that He is the true treasure, and that there is nothing in this world that is worth holding on to above Him.

Jim Elliot - *“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”*

This is not a call to sacrifice; this is a call to be a wiser investor. Typically you would diversify. Not with the kingdom. Nothing is as sure a bet as this. All this world counts as valuable can not compare to knowing Christ.

Jonah 2:8-9 - *“Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. ⁹ But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD.”*