

Matthew 13:44-52 – What's Your Treasure?

For the past few weeks we've heard Jesus teaching through parables, and today He does the same. The parable of the Hidden Treasure and the parable of the Pearl of Great Value are short parables, but even though they're short in words, they're long in meaning. And as we hear these stories, we begin to ask ourselves "What's my treasure? What do I value the most?"

The answer to these questions is often treasure, that is, money and things. Simply put, we're obsessed with our stuff. It's all we think about. Luther said there's no greater false god than Mammon. When we have money and things we trust in them, before we trust in God. When our wallets are fat and bank accounts are in the black, we feel secure; without a care in the world. We think we're living in Paradise. On the other hand, when we're short on cash, we still trust in it before God. If we just get some more money, a more reliable car, a nicer home, the latest and greatest tech, then all will be well. We watch the lifestyles of the rich and famous and we want to be them. We covet all they have.

But not all treasure is gold and silver. There's lots of other things we value, like our reputation. We treasure our standing in the eyes of the world. We want others to like us, to think well of us. We want to be part of the in-crowd, so we do the things they approve of, even if God's Word says otherwise. We keep quiet on what we consider the controversial topics: abortion, elections, homosexuality, divorce, cohabitation, just to name a few. We stay silent going along with the world's view of right and wrong instead of listening to God who created the world.

We treasure our relationships, our family and friends. These people are the most important to us. We value them above all else, sometimes even more than God. We center our whole lives on these relationships so that we push our relationship with God the Father to the back. We ignore prayer time. We don't listen to His Word. We skip the hour or two of worship and study on Sunday morning because we're visiting friends on vacation or family is in town. Everyone else gets our attention but God.

Family and friends, our reputation, money and things, these are just a few of the worldly treasures that we obsess over. And in this obsession, we lose sight of the true treasures: God's kingdom, His forgiveness and everlasting life, Christ our Savior.

The treasures of this world can't provide us with life. Sure, they might make life a little more enjoyable and easier at times, but they can't give us everlasting life. In the end all earthly treasures fail. Our money runs out, someone decides they just don't like us, family and friends leave, and we're left all alone with only our sin and death. Nothing on earth can overcome these. Only Christ and His cross can do that. Forgiveness and everlasting life can only be found in the kingdom of heaven. These are the true treasures that we should value the most. We should be willing to give up everything for these treasures ... and that's how we understand these two parables.

Hearing the parable of the Hidden Treasure and the parable of the Pearl of Great Value we assume we're the man and the merchant who give up everything to buy their treasure. We assume that Jesus is telling us that we need to give up all we have to acquire the kingdom, but this understanding isn't complete. Yes, we're to treasure the kingdom of heaven. Yes, we're to seek first the kingdom of God, but we can only do that because God has treasured us first.

We can't be the man or merchant in the parables because we can't do anything to acquire the kingdom of heaven. We can't buy heaven, with money or with works. Our sinful nature, the world, and the devil would love for us to think that we can. We often comfort ourselves with our good deeds. Receiving the praise of the world gives us a sense of security. But none of this is good enough to get us into the kingdom. All of our works are useless in this respect; they have no value. We have nothing to offer that is worth a place in God's kingdom.

No we're not the man; God is the man. And that means, we're His treasure. God is the merchant who sold everything He had for you, His pearl. He did this not because of your good works or because there was anything good in you, but because He loves you.

When you think about it, a pearl is a great illustration of who we are. After all, what is a pearl? It's an irritant that gets trapped in an oyster or clam that they then have to cover to make smooth. That's what we are, the irritant. We're sinners who sin. That's all we do. There's nothing of value in us, there's nothing good in us apart from Christ, and yet God still gave up His Son so that He could have you.

Moses, addressing the people of ancient Israel, said, **“The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession ... not because you were more in number, but because the LORD loves you.”** God chose the people of ancient Israel to be His people, His treasured possession because He loved them. And He chooses you, the people of His Church, the New Israel, to be His people, His treasured possession because He loves you. And in order to have you, He gave up Christ Jesus.

The apostle Paul said, **“[God] did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all.”** The man sold all that he had to buy the field with the treasure. The merchant sold all He had to buy the pearl. God gave up His Son to buy you. He bought you with the innocent suffering and death of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. God gave up Jesus on the cross in exchange for you, to redeem you from sin, to buy you back from death and the devil. With Christ's blood, in the waters of Baptism, He covers you with Christ's righteousness. Covering your sin, God makes you His pearl.

We're God's treasure, and because of that, His kingdom is ours. In faith we do seek first the kingdom of God. We do treasure God's forgiveness and everlasting life above all else. We treasure Christ above everything because we know nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Nothing compares to life in Him. Jesus, His forgiveness, His life are worth more than anything here on earth. Christ and His kingdom are more valuable than all of our money, our reputation, and our family and friends combined. Hearing these parables we pray. We pray a prayer of thanksgiving, thanking our Lord for treasuring us and giving up all, even His Son, for us. And we pray for Spirit-given faith, so that we would treasure His kingdom above all else. We're God's treasure, and His kingdom is ours.