

What Would You Give Up for God?

Matthew 13: 44-46

Introduction – A Universal Quest

There is a universal theme that runs through the many great stories of the world. It's a theme that becomes the compelling idea to great books, plays, and movies. It's universal because, to some extent, we all experience its pull. It is the theme of a quest – a search for something so compelling that it consumes your time, energy, imagination, and often your resources. It's the stuff of great stories like *Moby Dick*, *Don Quixote*, and Homer's *Odyssey*. Great quests are also found in movies like *The Wizard of Oz*, *Lord of the Rings*, and of course, the Indiana Jones movies.

A quest is a search for something that your heart deeply desires. It is something of great value to you. To you, it is a treasure. Some quests are minor and others are all consuming. When Diane goes shopping, she's on a quest – usually in the children's clothes section. Half of our nest egg has been invested in our grandchildren's wardrobe. I've been on quests, too. I spent all summer looking on Craig's List for a free sailboat: a quest that went unfulfilled. A few weeks ago, I was on a quest to buy my Christmas present on eBay. I know; it's weird. Diane buys her own, too. Most people who come into my office know that I like model ships. For Christmas, I wanted to get myself a kit to build another model boat this winter. I was watching one on eBay that caught my eye. The kit retails for around \$150.00 and the bidding was really low. I put in my bid at the last minute hoping I would get a steal for \$30.00. It sold for \$31.50. Rats! Now I wanted it even more! A similar model kit came up and I watched it and eventually won the bid. Not quite the steal the other one would have been, but nevertheless, I was able to fulfill my quest and purchase it for one-third the retail cost.

I'm sure you've been on quests before as well. Maybe it's just the right house or the right outfit. Perhaps a certain tool or toy that has captured your imagination. For many, it's just the right job. The fact is, there are things in this world that we esteem as having great value and we will do most anything to get them. Jesus takes that theme that is universal among all people and tells two similar parables describing the value of the Kingdom of God.

Text – Matthew 13:44-46**The Parable of the Hidden Treasure**

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Value

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Prayer**Two Similar Parables – What Did Jesus Intend?**

As we learned in our first message on parables, Jesus used them to illuminate those who had open hearts and would follow him and to confound those whose hearts were hard. After telling a parable, Jesus would often add, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (vs. 43). Jesus told many of the parables to the large crowds, but these two were told privately to his twelve disciples. I think that fact is significant as these parables were intended to enlighten those who had already decided to follow Jesus.

But what is the meaning of these two similar but different parables that were given only to Jesus’ inside followers? The question, when we come to Scripture is always “what was the original intention of Jesus’ teaching?” Faithful Bible teachers do not always agree.

I believe the simplest and plain meaning of a parable is what Jesus intended for his disciples to understand. Parables generally reveal one primary principle. They were not intended to be dissected in every minute detail for hidden meanings. It seems to me that the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value are best understood as the kingdom of God – or in Matthew’s term – the kingdom of heaven. He was explaining to them what they had already experienced for themselves. The early chapters of the gospels describe the calling of many of Jesus’ twelve disciples. They include the stories of Andrew, Peter, John, Philip, Nathaniel, and Matthew. All of them were overjoyed when they encountered Jesus and they left everything to follow him and pursue the kingdom of God.

If the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value both mean the kingdom of God, then what is the differing meaning in these similar but distinct parables?

The Hidden Treasure

In Jesus' day, there were no banks as we know them where you could securely deposit your wealth. And often times, when the land was being overrun by an enemy, a person would have no other option than to bury their treasures to avoid them being pillaged by the bad guys. For many reasons, people in ancient times would bury their treasures in hopes of securing them and retrieving them at a later time. Sometimes, they would not have that opportunity and the treasure would remain hidden until discovered by someone else. Such a scenario would not be all that unlikely in Jesus' day and so he used it in his parable. Now according to the law and custom of the day, the owner of a field owned all that was in it. When the man discovered the treasure, he could not just walk off with it because it belonged to the owner of the field, even though the owner was unaware of it. Jesus' parable makes sense that the treasure finder would gather all his resources to purchase the field so that he would have the rights to the treasure that far surpassed what he himself owned.

The Pearl of Great Value

The story of the pearl merchant is more readily understood by us as modern people. He was a man who had a studied eye on the value of pearls. He made it his business to seek out and purchase the best pearls he could find in order to make his living. In his diligent searching, he discovers a pearl so great that its value surpasses all that he has ever known or possesses. Recognizing its extravagant value, he surrenders all his personal resources to purchase that which far exceeds what he already has.

The Distinction Between the Two Stories

The distinction between these two men is important. One diligently sought his treasure while the other one stumbled upon it. That is how it is with those whose eyes are opened to the kingdom of God and salvation in Jesus Christ. There are those who, like the pearl merchant, seek long and hard for the meaning of life and for God. Their search may take them from one religion to another. Other people search through intellectual investigation or some, sadly, through substance or sexual addictions, nearly destroying themselves along the way. They know something is missing in their life and they search hard and long for it. They will not be content

until they find the missing piece that will give their life meaning. And then one day, whether it is in a gospel meeting or perhaps in a personal Bible study, their eyes are opened and understand the gospel. They finally grasp that all their searching is meaningless. They understand that they need God. Without him, they are doomed to empty searching in this life and eternal punishment in the afterlife. Their eyes are opened and they see that faith in Jesus Christ and his death on the cross for their sins is the only way to God – to have the abundant life that they were seeking all along! And so they gladly surrender all of their life to embrace Christ by faith and follow him.

But the man who accidentally found the treasure is quite different. He didn't even know that he was seeking but God opened his eyes to his great need and the eternal worth of Jesus Christ. By the grace of God, he immediately embraces the gospel, leaving his old life behind to follow Jesus. In this we see the indiscriminate grace of God. He is willing to reveal himself to the one who diligently seeks him as well as the person who doesn't. Jesus tells a parable with similar meaning about workers who go into a field at different times but are paid the same wage. God is not like us. You cannot earn his favor. He give to any that he wills. We can only marvel that he included us.

Those Who Gave It All

I think this interpretation is the plain meaning that Jesus intended for his disciples. While you cannot purchase your salvation, its value above all other things will cause the true disciple to give all to follow Jesus. This meaning is consistent with Jesus' teaching and the example of God-followers throughout Scripture.

...Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"

Matthew 16:24-26

- Noah gave up his reputation to build a huge Ark in obedience to God.
- At age 80, Abraham left his hometown and lifestyle to follow God. He surrendered everything to follow him wherever he led.

- Moses turned his back on the riches of Egypt as Pharaoh's son. "He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward." (Heb. 11:26)
- All the Old Testament prophets forsook a comfortable life in obedience to God, facing persecution and, in many cases, death.
- Peter, James, and John left their father and families, along with their fishing nets to become fishers of men with Jesus.
- Matthew gave up his lucrative tax-collecting business to become a man of integrity in following Jesus.
- The Apostle Paul, like the pearl merchant, was a zealous Pharisee pursuing God in his quest for legalistic perfection when Jesus met him on the Damascus Road. In the book of Philippians, Paul lists all of his significant accomplishments and then, turning his back on them, declares "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ...For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:7-8).
- Throughout the history of the church, men and women of great accomplishment gave up everything to follow Jesus and serve him in his Kingdom. I think of Martin Luther, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, David Brainerd, Adoniram Judson, and D.L. Moody. These and countless other people heard Jesus' call to follow him and surrendered everything.

You see, in these parables, Jesus is explaining the kingdom of heaven. The other gospels call it the kingdom of God. It is the same thing. The kingdom that Jesus came to bring is where God rules and reigns. In the kingdom of God, God owns everything. He rules over everything. That is why it is necessary for those who wish to follow Jesus to give up their lives for his sake. And yet, today, this radical idea is often far from what we practice as Christians. We speak of "giving our lives to Christ" but we often consider our faith simply as a "value-added commodity" that simply adds a religious and seemingly self-righteous element to our life. We go to church and act like nice people. We expect God to take us to heaven when we die. But if we were to be honest, Christ is not really the center of our life. We haven't really given up all for him. That's not the gospel that Jesus taught in this parable to his disciples. That's a modern gospel of convenience. In the end, it leaves the person just as empty as if he never really found Christ.

What Would You Give Up for God?

Today, Jesus, in these parables calls you and me to a place of radical commitment. To put it simply, “Are you all in?” Have you given everything to Jesus in order to follow him? What would you give up for God? Are you willing to give up your social standing and dignity? If you really became committed to truly following Jesus, what would others think of you? Does that matter? Are you willing to humble yourself and become radical for God? Are you willing to give up your fear? Can you really trust God to guide and direct your life if you turn all the control over to him? Are you willing to give up your self-righteousness? Oh sure, you’re a good person. But not good enough for God. Only Jesus is good enough. You’ll need to confess that you are a sinner in need of God’s mercy. Can you do that? Are you willing to give up your goals and your life’s direction in order to follow him? That’s a tough one! Both men in the parables sold everything. What would you give up for the kingdom of God?

Jesus said, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 10:39)

Like the men in the parables, whatever you give up for God is nothing compared the great value and great joy of knowing and following Jesus. Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.” (Luke 18:29)

So, what will it be? What would you give up for God?