

How Much is the Gospel Worth?

Matthew 13:44-53

Mark Vroegop

44 "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. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, 46 who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

47 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. 48 When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. 49 So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

51 "Have you understood all these things?" They said to him, "Yes." 52 And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Matt 13:44-52).

Today we come to the end of Matthew's largest collection of parables in his entire gospel. We've learned that parables are meant to illumine truth to the followers of Jesus while hiding it from those who have rejected him. We've learned that each parable is designed to communicate a particular truth about the kingdom of heaven:

- Sower – the kingdom is received by a few who grow over time
- Wheat and Weeds – the kingdom has a delayed vindication
- Mustard Seed and Leaven – the kingdom has a deceptive influence

We will see a few more parables as we make our way through this wonderful book (see chapters 18-25), but Matthew ends his collection with a series of short parables that identify the real worth of the kingdom of heaven. It is almost as if Matthew wants us to see the reason why embracing the kingdom is really worthwhile. These parables are unique to Matthew, and it looks like he uses them to make a final appeal for belief in Jesus.

As I have said before, Jesus is an enigma. His words are often confusing and challenging. Jesus tends to challenge the status quo of our lives. He calls for complete allegiance and following him is always costly. However, according to Jesus, his kingdom is worthy of any kind of sacrifice and even the ultimate sacrifice. Later in Matthew we will hear Jesus say, ""If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For

whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt 16:24-26).

Matthew ends this collection of parables by laying out for us the worthiness of the gospel – the good news about the kingdom. He shows us that **nothing is more valuable than the gospel**. And we see this value expressed in three ways:

1. A value that eclipses everything (vv 44-46)

Jesus gives two parables with very similar points. The first is the parable of the hidden treasure and the second is the parable of the pearl of great price. Both parables turn on the discovery of something valuable and both show extraordinary actions in response to what is found.

In the first parable we find that Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a treasure that is hidden in a field. A man, who we can only assume is working the land but is obviously not the owner, discovers the treasure, and then he covers it back up.

During the time of Jesus precious items and even money were often buried in secret locations for protection and safe-keeping. The possibility of an invading army, thieves, and the absence of secure banks caused people to hide their resources in the ground. We will see this in Matthew 25:14-30 in the parable of the talents where one of the servants hides the talent (the equivalence of twenty years of daily wages¹) in the ground. With all those hidden resources, it would not be too uncommon for buried treasure to be discovered.

Some of you might also wonder and even be bothered about the ethics of a man who presumably works for another not telling the owner what he has found. Three things to note here: First, keep in mind that parables only have one point, and Jesus is not making an ethical point here. Secondly, rabbinic law allowed a person who came across money or other valuables to keep them.² So "finders-keepers-losers-weepers" was in play then as well. Finally, notice that the man doesn't just take the treasure which he surely could have. Instead the man takes action to purchase the field so that he might be the rightful owner.

Now to the main point which is found in verse 44: "Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys the field." The verse identifies the critical role of joy in the radical action of selling all that he has. Joy is not the fruit of actions; it is the root of his actions. Joy is not the effect; it is the cause. The man acts with no reluctance or hesitation even though the actions of selling everything are very radical, and he did it happily. The joy of what he has discovered eclipsed everything else. Therefore, what might seem foolish or extreme to others made perfect sense to the man because he knows the surpassing value of the treasure. What he discovered eclipsed everything.

¹ R.T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 540.

² John MacArthur, The MacArthur Commentary – Matthew 8-15, (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 1987), 382

The second parable makes the same point but in a different way. The parable of the pearl of great price differs from the former parable in that the merchant is actively pursuing and searching for this great pearl. He doesn't mistakenly stumble on it; he's searching diligently for it. Pearls, as they are in our culture, are precious commodities and a symbol of wealth and splendor. Even heaven itself is said to have 12 gates made of pearl (Rev 21:21).

This man's livelihood was based upon finding pearls. But when he found this one, he sold everything that he had in order to secure it. The newly discovered pearl has a worth that exceeds everything the man has ever found. Therefore, he sells everything in order to gain one pearl. Once he had this pearl he did not need any other. This pearl eclipsed the value of all the others put together.³

Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is like a man's pursuit of buried treasure and a merchant's purchase of a very costly pearl. The kingdom of heaven is valuable beyond our wildest dreams. What is the kingdom of heaven? In short it is the reign and rule of God through the personal sacrifice of Jesus Christ, making peace with God a possibility. And Jesus says that it is so valuable that the joy of finding it eclipses the value of everything else. The gospel is like a buried treasure and costly pearl and when you see it for what it really is through the work of the Holy Spirit – it is beautiful beyond everything else.

Therefore, joy is not just a product of true conversion; it is central to conversion. What do I mean by that? The Bible tells us that there are immeasurable spiritual riches in the person and work of Christ (Eph 2:2), but our sinful, natural bent is to be blinded to this reality by Satan and the power of sin (2 Cor 4:4). The result is that human beings in our natural and sinful state value, desire, worship and take joy the wrong things – they "worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom 1:25). But when the Holy Spirit comes, the Gospel is seen for what it truly is.

⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6).

What happens in this moment is a work of God's grace as the person sees with joy the full beauty of who Jesus is. Receiving Christ as Savior comes as a person recognizes and confesses that Jesus is indeed Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3). So conversion means many things and it includes seeing the gospel with a new set of eyes and loving what you see so much that you turn from everything else. Repentance therefore is not a reluctant, half-hearted event. It is a joyful awareness of all that Jesus is and a fleeing to him. Joy is not just a fruit. The attractiveness of the treasure of the gospel compels a man or woman to turn from his or her sin and run to Christ. There is nothing more appealing, more attractive,

³ France, 542.

more glorious or more full of absolute joy than the good news that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (1 Timothy 1:15). And when you understand that, the value of that news eclipses everything.

2. A value which impacts eternity (vv 47-50)

The next parable is about a fishing net, and it is designed to be a strong warning. This parable carries a similar tone as the parable of the weeds and the wheat but the focus is even more on the separation that will take place at judgment. It seems as though Matthew lists this parable after the previous two in order to emphasize that the eternal impact of the making the right value assessment.

Often you hear this parable called the parable of the dragnet. That title is used because of the kind of net that Jesus has in mind here. This net was the kind that was draped between two boats or a point on the shore and one boat in the lake. It had weights at the bottom and floats on top, and the boat in the water would pull the opposite end of the net toward the secured point, forming a circle and trapping every kind of fish inside. The net would then be dragged to shore full of all kinds of fish. The Sea of Galilee had at least 20 different species of fish, but some were not able to be eaten.⁴ So the fisherman would separate the good from the bad, and throw away the inedible fish.

Jesus makes the parable painfully clear:

“So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 13:49-50).

As we saw last week, the close of the age is the Day of Judgment. This is day that is coming, a day when the risen Christ will sit as Judge over the entire world, separating who belong to him. This is mentioned in two other places in Matthew:

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness" (Matt 7:21-23).

The key in Matthew 7 is the connection between the separation and knowing Jesus. One's personal response to Jesus determines eternal destiny. There is another text that connects the separation to the evidence of saving faith.

⁴ Ibid.

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44 Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' 45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt 25:31-46)

The righteous receive the blessed kingdom and the evil are sent away to eternal punishment when Matthew 13 describes as a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" – a description of Hell as a place of constant torment.

This parable is meant to show us that spiritual decisions made during this life time have an eternal impact. In other words, what you value in this lifetime determines your eternal destiny. There will be countless people who lived their lives as if Jesus was worthless, foolish, and pointless. But in the end all the world will know that he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. However, knowing who he is without knowing him personally is eternally dangerous.

This parable is a warning that the dragnet of judgment will come, and your perspective on the worth of Jesus and his kingdom will have eternal consequences. The warning here is clear: be careful – eternally careful – as to what you consider valuable. What you do with Jesus determines your eternal destiny.

3. A value that demands passionate explanation (vv 51-53)

The final parable follows an exchange between Jesus and his disciples. He asks them, "Have you understood all these things?" And in response to their affirmative answer Jesus tells them, not what the kingdom of heaven is like, but what they should be like. So he is describing the kingdom of heaven by telling them how they should respond in light of the fact that they understand what Jesus is saying.

Jesus proceeds to call his disciples scribes trained for the kingdom of heaven. This is an interesting thing to say. After all, scribes were not generally viewed by Jesus in a positive light and his disciples were not from the intellectual crowd. Jesus seems to have plans for them to become the teachers of the kingdom. However, what he says next is even more intriguing.

He compares the scribes of the kingdom to a master of a house who "brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (v 52). Jesus seems to suggest that a master, in order to provide for the needs of his household, takes new and old things out of his resources. The implication being that the disciples are going to provide for the people by helping them understand the body of truth that Jesus is teaching them.

The old and new must refer to Jesus' new teaching and its connection to the Old Testament. Jesus himself had said that he did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17), and yet he also put new color on the real meaning of the Law ("You've heard that it has been said...but I say to you" – Matt 5:21-22).

The gospel deserves passionate explanation, and whenever men or women fully understood the beauty and the power of it, they proclaimed it with boldness and even reckless abandonment. The book of Matthew ends with a clear teaching mission – "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (28:19). And in one of the greatest evangelistic messages in Bible, Peter preaches Christ from the Old Testament during the feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:18-36). I love what Peter and John say to the religious rulers when they were told in Acts 4 to not speak about Jesus anymore: "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. 20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20 – NIV). Understanding and feeling the value of what the gospel really is will loose your tongue to talk about it! Knowing and celebrating the value of what the gospel is, will increase your boldness in evangelism. Guilt will never work. Joy will!

There is one other very important way in you teach the world about the value of the gospel: suffering. Over and over the Bible calls us to value the gospel – being formed in the likeness of Jesus – as far more valuable than an easy life. The result is that we are called to rejoice in sufferings because it produces spiritual endurance (Rom 5:3). We are called to rejoice and be glad when persecution comes because great is our reward in heaven (Matt 5:11-12). James

tells us to consider it all joy when we encounter all kinds of trials (James 1:2-3). In the book of Hebrews the church was commended because they joyfully accepted the plundering of their goods at the hands of wicked people because they had a better possession in heaven (Hebrews 10:34).⁵ The value of the gospel was never meant to make the followers of Jesus cushy, soft, comfortable, and arrogant. The supreme worth of the gospel was meant to liberate us from the petty, temporary value of this life so that we could courageously follow Christ - to be like him in our life, death, and joy.

It was the writer of Hebrews who calls us to run with endurance while looking at Jesus, “who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). We are called to look at his finished work, look at the penalty of sin, but not to stop there; we have to see the joy! We have to see what he saw: that the plan of redemption was so beautiful, so glorious, and so infinitely valuable that it is worthy of immense sacrifice.

So what is the gospel worth? It is worth everything. And the beauty of its value is that when you understand what it is worth and when you understand its beauty you can triumphantly say, “All I have is Christ!”

Because when all you have is Christ, you have everything you’ll ever need!

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⁵ John Piper, When I Don't Desire God – How to Fight for Joy, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Publishers, 2004), 20-21.