

Your Kingdom Come

PART 12: 'A TREASURE AND A PEARL'

Each week we come together as the Church; as the people of God; gathered around the Word of God; in the Presence of God. Millions of brothers and sisters join us before the throne of God in worship. But who are we really? What are we? Why are we here? I am so glad you asked!

The Church is full of all kinds of people: the broken, the lonely, the wonderers, the hopeful, the enthusiastic, the lost, the passionate and the faithful. For many of them, gathering on Sundays represents the whole of their Church experience. They will listen attentively to a sermon, sing a few songs, they'll be invited to pray and then they'll return to their lives. But for some, questions will start bubbling to the surface of their faith. Is this the extent of what Jesus intended for His followers? Who is the Church for? Why does the world need the Church? Is this as good as it gets?

Well we worked through a lot of that in our series *Being the Church* last year so I am confident you already know the answers to those questions, but let me remind you. The Church isn't the building where people attend weekly services. It's not a program or an event or a list of rules or a philosophy. The Church isn't a political affiliation, a club or a holiday tradition in December. The Church was never intended to be just an assembly of people wearing nice clothes and saying nice things. The Church is all the followers of Jesus everywhere. The Greek word for Church, the word behind the concept of Church is *Ekklesia* and it is the combination of two words *ek*, which means *out* and *kalleo* which means *called*. So the Church is the 'called out ones' - the collective body of all the followers of Jesus everywhere who are called out by Jesus for a purpose.

In the beginning of the book of Acts we see Jesus calling His disciples to a task, which is to bring something called the gospel, the good news to all the world - and this gospel would go out to all the outsiders: the forgotten, the abandoned and the excluded; and they, those outsiders, would see and receive that gospel as something profoundly good. But when Jesus talked about the gospel, it was always in conjunction with something else, something called the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, and in the kingdom of heaven, God's purposes are made apparent. There's justice and righteousness, there's hope for the poor and for the oppressed, and in the kingdom of heaven, mercy and forgiveness triumph over bitterness and resentment.

Now, people previously deemed to be far from God are brought into His family, adopted as His sons and daughters. Now the fullness of the kingdom of heaven, according to Jesus, is not merely expressed as a way for people to secure a ticket to heaven for when they die. Rather, the good news is that God's eternal kingdom is now invading time and space and moving into this present world. The people who belong to Jesus join Him in His world-wide restoration project - His mission - which is the re-establishment of His kingdom rule and reign. So the 'called out ones,' the Church, are committed to advancing this good news of God's kingdom into the world, not as a means of helping people avoid the world but rather to see God's kingdom life become real here and now, across the whole Church, with the power of the whole gospel, for the blessing of the whole world. That's who you are. That's why you're here. Any other reason why you are here must come second to God's reason for you being here. So let's take a deep breath and be prepared for what God has for us today. I want us to look at just three verses in Matthew chapter 13 and in those three verses we find two parables from Jesus about the Kingdom of Heaven.

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

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure. Do you feel the weight of those words? The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure - as opposed to absolutely everything else in our world being fodder and hay and wood and stubble that will burn up in the fire. But the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field - a treasure so valuable that this man gave up everything he had so he could buy that field and make that treasure his own. It became the most important thing in his life. Everything else meant nothing in comparison to making that treasure his own.

Unfortunately we all live in a world where we have many treasures. We are blessed beyond measure and richer than 80% of the people in the world. Which makes it harder for us to grasp this concept of treasuring one thing above everything else. We have many, many ‘pearls’ in our possession and I am not sure we would easily give them all up for just one ‘pearl’ of great value. We live in a culture which teaches us to believe that more is better and so quantity can become more important than quality. Many people will live their whole lives in that mindset. Some lucky ones might have their eyes opened to what a true treasure looks like and that awakening often comes through a crisis.

I can remember one weekend over 38 years ago like it was yesterday. We all have those memories which are burned into our historical timeline and carry more significance than the millions of other memories which fade into the back corners of our mind. It was the weekend of 16th-17th April 1983. Michelle and I had recently bought our very first home in Orange. We had welcomed our first child into the world 11 months earlier. I had a good job. We loved our new home. We had a good Church. Everything was close to perfect and being a handyman, I was really enjoying all the little projects around the house. But on this weekend I was tackling my largest project to date – a new patio cover along the back of our house. I had not built one before so I enlisted the help of my dad. We spent two long days together and produced a pretty awesome patio and I ended up spending more time with my father that weekend than I probably had in ten years. It was a great weekend, but I doubt that it would have remained so clear in my mind 38 years later had it not been for another event that week.

At 7am the following Thursday our phone rang and it was my sister telling me that dad had suffered a cardiac arrest in his sleep and when mum woke that morning he was dead. He was 54 years old and my baby sister was only 9 years old. I learned something in that moment, and more so in the days that followed. It doesn't matter how rich you are, it doesn't matter how fit you are; it doesn't matter how loved you are; it doesn't matter how blessed you are - you're going to die. It doesn't matter how strong you are, you're going to be weak. Your youth will be gone in the blink of an eye; your power wasted away in a moment as you vanish and become a memory. And in that moment everything you lived for doesn't matter anymore unless it is found within the perfect will of God.

The shock of learning of my father's sudden death was only surpassed by the realisation that I was not prepared for it. I was not prepared for my perfect world to be challenged or turned on its head. It was as though God was saying to me, *“Didn't you realise your father was dying? You are dying. Your children are dying, and the world they live in is already dead. This is not supposed to be your home. It should not be your main source of joy and purpose. It's not supposed to be the thing you're focussed on. Why look at a rotting carcass - when there's a treasure before you of infinite value?”*

Now you might think that's a pretty hard word from God at such a time but friends, very often it is only at such times that we are open to hearing the truth from God. He has been saying the same thing to us all through history, but we rarely listen.

Throughout all of Scripture, we hear God saying, *“Seek Me ... seek Me ... seek Me ... seek Me and you will find Me ... and I will show you great and mighty things that you do not know and have not heard and have not seen ... seek Me and My kingdom above everything else.”*

That’s what this parable is about. When the man found that treasure, at that moment everything else in his life became meaningless. Everything else took second place to that treasure. His greatest passion was directed towards one thing and one thing only. Now he probably had many loves in his life; he probably had many trinkets he called treasures; he probably bothered himself with all sorts of vain activities. But the moment His eyes were cast upon that treasure, absolutely everything else vanished and the only thing he could think about, the only thing he could focus on was what his eyes had seen. From that point forward, that is where his primary passion was directed.

Where is your primary passion directed today? If you are brutally honest with yourself right now, would you not admit that the focus of your life, the thoughts of your day and night are more given to the temporal; more given to the things of this world? Now you might say, *“Well you know, we live in the world, we’ve got to make money, we’ve got to eat.”* Listen, most people in the world aren't working so hard and striving so much just to eat. It’s all the other stuff we crowd into our lives and give value to which cost so much. May we hear the voice of the Spirit of God right now . . .

Don't you see, you only have a moment's time on this earth, only a moment. And God is your father, and your master and your keeper and your provider and He calls you to trust Him and turn away from all the things that glitter but are not gold and turn to the only thing that matters, Jesus Christ and the coming of His kingdom. So you raise your family as a godly heritage to the Lord and do everything within your means to support the mission of Christ at home and then across the earth. As I've said before, there's only two aspects of mission - you're either called to go down into the well, or you're called to hold the rope for those who go down. Either way, there's going to be scars on your hands. It's just as costly to hold the rope as it is to go down and it causes just as many scars to hold the rope for the ones who go.

So where are your scars? What has the mission of Christ cost you? What has the Great Commission cost you? What has preparing the bride of Christ cost you? What has the will of God cost you? Where are your scars? If the kingdom of heaven is your treasure; if God’s kingdom is your pearl of great value, then you will have scars. You will pay whatever price you need to pay for that which is more important than anything else in this world. That’s what the Apostle Paul means when he exhorts us again right now, through the Holy Spirit:

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature ...” (Colossians 3:1-5)

When the man finds this treasure in the field the verse says, *“In his joy ...”* he sold everything to buy the field and secure that treasure. For joy, not for discipline, not for dedication, not for salvation, but in his joy he sells all that he has and buys that field. Joyfully, willingly, he says, *“Lord, take it. It's yours. Take it all. Nothing compares to this treasure.”* Do you realize what privilege you have? If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you are the most privileged person on the face of the earth. You have been called to know Him and to be His disciple. There is no greater privilege.

Here's another wonderful, but confronting truth. God doesn't need anybody to fulfill His plan and purpose. If all the preachers and all the missionaries on the face of the earth perished today, God would still do what God planned to do.

God doesn't need anybody. But God has chosen to open the door and invite us into the holy of holies. He has granted us the privilege of being part of what He's doing. He can do it alone but He doesn't want to. He wants to partner with us, His children, to save the world and advance His kingdom. Think about that. Let me sharpen the point some more:

The only reason you're alive is because air is free. Your life has no meaning; your clothes have no meaning; your job has no meaning; your money has no meaning; your time has no meaning; your thoughts have no meaning ... other than within the context of God's kingdom and God's will. When you truly set your mind and heart on things above and not on earthly things; when you truly seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, then at that point, absolutely everything in your life can be filled with true meaning and purpose when it comes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and when it is harnessed and directed into fulfilling Christ's mission on earth.

When Jesus rose from the dead, He filled the grave with light and life. Your life is a grave, you were born into this fallen world spiritually dead and nothing about your life impacted the reality of God's kingdom. But when you were raised to life in Christ, when you were born again into the Kingdom of God, everything about your life now means something as it is surrendered to God. Now, your whole life is lived between two days; you live between the day when Christ hung on that cross and the day when all mankind will stand before that same Christ. Those two days are the bookends to your life and they define your life as seen by God within His kingdom. You are who you are because of the cross of Christ. You live and move and have your being here and now in Christ, for Christ and through Christ and the only reason you and this whole planet are still here is so that you might embrace the mission of Christ to bring all of God's lost children home. Everything else must find its meaning and its significance in *that* reality or you have missed the whole point of life.

Brothers and sisters, this is not a time for thinking about the world. This is a time for cutting the ropes and letting the wind fill your sails so you can be carried by God into His kingdom purposes. The most privileged people in the world have the greatest responsibility. God is offering you the greatest privilege to participate with Him in the greatest work any man, woman or young person could imagine. So those three words are perhaps the greatest prayer we could ever pray, "*Your kingdom come.*" However, as I hope you have discerned from this teaching today, if you truly want to pray "*Your kingdom come,*" then you will need to utter three more words and they will be much harder to pray, but without them, God's kingdom will continue to elude you. Those words are "*I surrender all.*" You can't have one without the other.

We will not see the reality and the power and the glory of God's kingdom while we maintain our own kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is that pearl of great price. The kingdom of heaven is that treasure of inestimable value and we will only see the fullness of God's Kingdom when we surrender control of everything in our kingdom and the kingdom of this world. Then, and only then, will we know the power and reality of Paul's words to the Church in Galatia:

*"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.
The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God,
who loved me and gave himself for me."*

(Galatians 2:20)