

“The Kingdom of God: Joy or Judgment?”

Matthew 13:44-53

March 3, 2019

As we return to our study of Matthew 13, we find ourselves in the midst of a string of parables that Jesus tells to reveal essential truths about the Kingdom of heaven. It may be helpful to remind us that the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, represents the rule and reign of God. The King over this kingdom is Christ. Thus, “God reigns where Christ reigns and Christ reigns where God reigns.”¹ So we can say that the kingdom of God comes today in the lives of those who honor the kingly reign of Jesus as Lord. There is a present and future aspect to the Kingdom of God: Jesus kingly rule in believers’ lives now and his future climactic reign in heaven. Heaven is heavenly because there God rules and reigns exclusively having triumphed over the rebellion of Satan, sin, and evil.

So when I use the term Kingdom of heaven, I’m referring to living under the favor and blessing of God by coming under the kingly reign of Christ, which is only possible through the cross whereby Jesus paid sin’s penalty of death for us. So when a person repents of his sinful rebellion, confesses with his mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in his heart that God raised Him from the dead, his citizenship is transferred from the kingdom of self and this world where Satan reigns to the kingdom of God where Christ reigns. So believers experience a foretaste of the Kingdom now when they live under the Lordship of Christ, all the while anticipating the perfect peace and blessing of His reign in heaven. Today’s insight into the kingdom is this:

The Kingdom of heaven is supreme joy to those who will forsake all to embrace it’s infinite worth, but severe judgment to those who fail to make it their sole treasure.

1. **The joy of the Kingdom is worth forfeiting every lesser treasure to have its supreme gain (vs. 44-46).**

The first two parables in our text have essentially the same thrust—that ***the kingdom of God is of such infinite value, that it is a joy to embrace it even at the cost of all other earthly pleasures.*** Let’s begin with vs. 44: “*The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*”

This is an intriguing parable, because who doesn’t want to find hidden treasure, who doesn’t want to make that epic find of the century (Billy the Kid photo).

A few years ago, my son and I had the opportunity to go on a medal detecting treasure hunt with Ian and Elizabeth. If its exciting to find and old rusty gear underground, how much more exciting to find something of great worth and significance. We certainly don’t want to be like the owner of the field who later discovers he had something of great value within his hands, yet failed to grasp its value. I have been on that side of the equation.

Illus: 1970’s Fender precision jazz bass (vintage model)

Well in ancient times it was not uncommon for people to hide whatever wealth they had in the ground. They didn’t have a banking system like we do today and the historian Josephus tells us that because people were afraid of being plundered by their enemies during times of war, they buried much of their wealth.² If the individual died or was taken captive in war, his treasure remained hidden for someone to later find. This is the kind of scenario Jesus is painting in this parable.

A man somehow discovers an abandoned, hidden treasure in a field. He immediately recognizes that this treasure is far more valuable than his entire net worth and so covers it back up (notice that he doesn’t steal it), and he goes and sells everything he has in order to buy that portion of property so that the treasure is rightfully his.

¹ John Piper, “The Kingdom of Heaven is a Treasure” (November 20, 2005 sermon on Matthew 13:44 at www.desiringgod.org).

² John MacArthur, *The MacArthur NT Commentary: Matt 8-15*, pg. 382.

The treasure represents the kingdom of God and its infinite worth. The man represents the one who becomes the beneficiary of the kingdom and the joy of its worth. The main point of this parable is that the joy of the Kingdom exceeds the worth of all other treasures combined. But let me point out some additional insights from this parable regarding the Kingdom of heaven.

- a. ***The value of the kingdom is not evident to all.*** Notice, that the treasure is hidden, it cannot be seen at superficial level. Its not out in the open for everyone to see. The journey to the kingdom of God is one of discovery. Many will be exposed to the truth of the kingdom, yet dismiss it as insignificant and walk past it.
- b. ***Some may unsuspectingly discover the value of the kingdom.*** This man was probably not out hunting for treasure. Rather he was surprised by what he found. It's important for us to remember that this is a reflection of how many come into the kingdom. Unlike the man in the next parable, they are not out looking for spiritual truth. Yet they find themselves in a surprising situation whereby they hear the gospel, suddenly see its worth, and embrace it with great joy. This may be corrective for us. While we look for those whom God seems to be drawing to Himself, we would be wise to share the gospel even with those who don't seem to be seeking. We may be just as surprised as they are with how God opens the eyes of their heart.
- c. ***Joy is the motivation for embracing the kingdom.*** This man takes such radical measures ("selling all that he had") because of his exceeding joy in attaining the treasure. Joy is what motivates him. Someone doesn't come into the kingdom merely because they see the depths of their sin. Many people see the sinfulness of their sin but stay there. They must also have their eyes opened to see the infinite worth, and sweetness, and joy of Jesus who saves them from the depths of their sin and transfers their citizenship from hell to heaven. We can't share the gospel without talking about the seriousness of sin. Nor

should we stop short of the joy of Christ—that all in Him is mine when I believe and embrace Him as Savior and King.

- d. ***While we cannot buy (or earn) the Kingdom, there is an "cost" to embracing it.*** Notice again that this man sells all that he has. The point is *not* that we can somehow purchase or earn the kingdom. In fact, quite the opposite is true. He had enough money to buy the field, but not enough to buy the treasure. The reason he is so joyful is that he was going to attain something of far greater worth than he could ever afford. The point of this parable is not buying but relinquishing. The value of the kingdom is worth relinquishing all lesser "treasures" to have the one great treasure of God Himself. We call this the cost of discipleship. The Kingdom of God, His saving grace, is worth relinquishing the kingdom of self and the kingdom of this world.
- e. ***The Kingdom of God belongs to those for whom it is their sole treasure.*** The kingdom of God is not for divided hearts. You can't have dual citizenship in the kingdom of God and any other kingdom, whether self or the world. Notice, this man sold out for a supreme joy in Christ. Now, does this mean that as a follow of Christ you can't enjoy other things like nature, food, and family? No, actually what happens is that when God is in His proper place, reigning over us, all other good things become legitimate joys. Once we treated them as idols (as the sources of happiness), but not now we rightly see them as gifts of grace from God who deserves our ultimate gratitude, love, and praise.

Secondary pleasures can only serve their proper God-pleasing purpose when God is the sole source in which our joy is rooted. This is why Jesus told the rich young ruler to go and sell all that he had. That was the cost of discipleship for him because his wealth was a form of idolatry that was keeping him from the singular joy of God. This truth that the kingdom of God belongs to those for whom it is their sole treasure is most graphically illustrated in Jesus words about family—what could be more precious to us than that! Earlier in Matt 10:37, Jesus said, "*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me;*

and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me [that is, he who loves self more than Me] is not worthy of Me.” Jesus is not advocating that we love our families less but that we love them better by making God our sole treasure so that we love them with a whole-hearted love for God rather than expecting them to be the fulfillment of our joy.

- f. ***The Kingdom of God is for those who personally, joyfully, and actively respond to its worth.*** This man has to make a personal transaction to attain the treasure—he acts on what he finds! The treasure isn’t ours automatically. We are not born into the Kingdom. We are born into sin and therefore we are born into the kingdom of this world. We are not a part of the kingdom simply because we are close to the kingdom or because we have friends in the kingdom. I grew up only 16.5 miles from the Canadian border but that doesn’t make me Canadian. I may sound Canadian. I may look Canadian, I may act Canadian, I may have Canadian friends, but I am American. The only way for me to become a Canadian is through a transaction of citizenship. And the only way to become a citizen of the kingdom of God is a personal renunciation of living under the sovereignty of self, Satan, and this world, to live under the sovereign rule of heaven by bowing my knee to Christ as my King.

The apostle Paul was like the man in this parable. He wasn’t out looking for Christ. The value of Kingdom appeared hidden to him as he persecuted the church. Yet to his surprise, he discovered Jesus abruptly on the road to Damascus and his eyes were opened to too see His divine worth and significance. Yet later, Paul speaks of the cost of following Christ in terms of joy when He personally embraced Christ by faith as His sole treasure. In Philippians 3, He says, *“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”* (Phil 3:7-10).

Now in verses 45-46, Jesus tells a very similar parable that carries the same basic thrust that ***the kingdom of God is of such infinite value, that it is a joy to embrace it even at the cost of all other earthly pleasures.*** [vs. 45-46]

The one distinguishing difference between the parable of the treasure and the parable of the pearl is that while the treasure was discovered unexpectedly, the man who finds the pearl is a merchant, a seeker, one in search of merchandise, or in this case spiritual truth. As in the last parable, so we see here again that:

- The Kingdom’s value will not be discerned by all. As a merchant he is in search for something not all people are looking for or would recognize.
- The Kingdom’s value is worth being sought after.
- Joy is the motivation for attaining the kingdom’s worth.
- The pearl of God’s Kingdom is worth relinquishing all other pearls in order to have it.
- In order to come into the Kingdom of God, you cannot have multiple pearls, but only one—Christ must be your sole treasure, your pearl of great price.

The parable of the buried treasure is for the one who knows he can’t afford the Kingdom of God. His joy is in attaining what He could never afford given the poverty of his sinful life. He recognizes the undeserved value and benefit of relinquishing all he has (including his debts of sin) in order to receive what he does not deserve, namely divine grace.

The parable of the pearl of great price is for the person who holds many pearls in his hands. He may think he has buying power, yet in reality he must relinquish what he sees as assets for the sake of the greatest pearl. The kingdom of God is not purchased with the pearls of religious heritage, good works, moral behavior, a multitude of spiritual ideas and practices, or even all these pearls combined. The Kingdom of heaven is for those who have just One Pearl; the Lord Jesus Christ who paid the penalty of our sin through His sacrifice on the cross so that we could be clothed in His perfect righteousness when we are wedded to Him by faith.

The joy of the Kingdom is worth forfeiting every lesser treasure to have its supreme gain. Yet someone might say, well I’m happy for the one who found his buried treasure or his pearl of great price but I’m quite content with where I am in life without God. One of the unfortunate realities with human nature is that we tend to either be discontent where we should be content or we are too content where we should be discontent (either never satisfied or too apathetic).

So Jesus tells another parable in vs. 47-50 to shake us out of our indifference. Here he contrasts the Joy of the Kingdom for those who enter with the Judgment that awaits those who, although they may be near the kingdom, never embrace its supreme worth.

2. Judgment awaits those who are near the kingdom but never embrace its supreme worth (vs. 47-50).

[Vs. 47-50] A drag net is a net that had floats on the top and weights on the bottom to create a sort of wall. This net was dragged between two boats that would move in a circular direction forming a massive trap that would catch everything in its path. When the net was brought up, the fisherman would have to sort through their catch to keep the good fish and throw back any of the inedible or unclean fish.

Jesus likens this picture to the angels in the last day who will take out the wicked from among the righteous and throw them into the furnace which represents hell, a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

We know from the earlier parable of the wheat and the tares that some among the church appear to be a part of the kingdom of God but are in fact not members of the kingdom and in the last day will be tragically cast into the lake of fire. "Weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vs. 42, 50) represents the suffering and torment of hell. *Gnashing* means to grind the teeth in rage or pain; the rage that comes from suffering that never ends.

The Bible presents hell as a literal, physical, eternal place. There is no joy there. Only the constant punishment of sin against an infinite, eternal, holy God.

The parable of the dragnet is teaching the same thing as the wheat and the tares. The emphasis of this parable is on the terrifying judgment that waits those who have not truly embraced the joy of the kingdom of God as their sole treasure. Notice in the parable of the dragnet how closely associated the bad fish are with the good. They intermingle with each other and are right in the vicinity of the net. Yet what awaits them is not joy but judgment. Why? Because they choose to make other things their ultimate treasure at

the expense of the kingdom of God. ***You cannot have something else be ultimate in your life and say, "Jesus is Lord."***

Some people struggle with the doctrine of hell, even though it is clearly taught all throughout the Bible. They ask, "how can a good God send people into eternal torment and suffering?" But this is actually the wrong question. The question we need to ask is, "now can a holy, infinite, eternal God not deal justly with the evil of sin and still be good?" You say, "what about God's mercy?" God's mercy was displayed at the cross, where the Son of God took the weight of sin upon Himself and died in our place. Yet men have the audacity to refuse that mercy and condemn God for not being good.

What we must see in Matt 13 is that there is no middle ground. Either you wholeheartedly embrace the kingdom with joy for the mercy of God or you stand outside loving self and the things of this world at the expense of the heaven leaving you with a destiny of judgment. Your sin must be dealt with fully. If you have not trusted Christ and loved and embraced Him who bore the full weight of your sin, then you must bear it even if it takes all of eternity. O may God give you eyes to see Jesus as the Pearl of Great Price, your sole, priceless treasure, and for joy forsake anything that would keep you from Him!

There is one final parable in Matt 13 that reminds us that...

3. The Joy of the kingdom is not only to be sought after and treasured, but shared with others (vs. 51-52).

[vs. 51-52] Having understood the parables of Matt 13, Jesus compares the disciples to scribes. The job of a scribe was to study and to teach the Scriptures. Jesus here is instructing His disciples to teach not only the Old Testament Scriptures, but also the new revelations of the Kingdom that Jesus has been setting forth in parables. As a good steward of a household makes use of things both old and new, they are to be good stewards who teach what has been entrusted to them from Jesus, both old and new.

My friends every person stands at the crossroad of eternal joy and eternal judgment. We have been entrusted with the only gospel (good news) by

which they may be saved. *We exist to glorify God by loving Him with all of our heart, delighting in His Word, and declaring His gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit for the transformation of lives in a vital and joyful union with Jesus Christ.*

Is Jesus your treasure? Is He your pearl of great price? You must know that the only Way for you to come into the Kingdom God is not by what you do but by loving what Christ has done for you. You are saved only by grace through faith in that grace that was provided for you through the death of Jesus Christ. Yet it is essential to not only know that but to also love it with all the affections of your heart, for when you love it you will gladly forsake your sin and your loyalty to self and all the treasures of earth to have Jesus, and in having Him, having all the wealth of the kingdom of God.

2 Thessalonians 2:10 warns us that in the last days many will “perish because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.” Matthew 13 is a warning to those who stand so close to the Kingdom but are not yet in; those who know the truth but have yet to see it in such a way that they love the truth.

As we come to the Lord’s Table, it’s an opportunity for us to examine our hearts. What do you treasure most? Is it your own independence, to do whatever you want to do regardless of whether or not it is sinful? Or have you embraced Christ and His cross with supreme affection that causes you to struggle with your sinful tendencies and fight against sin so that it won’t spoil your superior joy in Christ?

Look to Jesus again. See in Him the joy of the kingdom: forgiveness of sin, the gift of His righteousness, the acceptance and favor of God as our Father, no more shame, guilt, or condemnation, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives, ongoing transformation into likeness of Christ, the assurance that He works all things together for good for those who love Him, and the guaranteed promise that the best is yet to come in heaven: no more sinning, no more sickness or pain or injury, no more evil or calamity, or depression or spiritual warfare, no more insecurity or strife or death. Just eternal peace, rapturous joy, and the perfect refuge of God’s

forever presence as He showers on us the infinite riches of His kindness (Eph 2:7). This is the joy of the kingdom that Christ offers you today.

Communion:

When Jesus took the bread and the cup, He said, this is My body which is given for you...this is my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sin (Mt. 26:26-28). The bread and cup represent Jesus’ life and death offered on your behalf. So that...

Bread: Rom 10:9-11, 13

“If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed...for whoever will call upon the name of the LORD will be saved.”

Cup:

You cannot have something else be ultimate in your life and say, “Jesus is Lord.” But when you see the true worth of Jesus, you will say with Paul,

“whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” (Phil 3:7-10).