

*“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.”* Matthew 13:44

The year was 1799 when a twelve-year-old boy named Conrad Reed skipped church on Sunday and went fishing in the Little Meadow Creek that wove its way through the family farm near Fayetteville, North Carolina. In an attempt to spear a fish, the young lad missed but his spear struck an interesting looking gold rock, which he picked up and carried back home. The rock rested out on the front porch for a few weeks until one day when the boy's father, John took the rock along to show a jeweller when he went into the town of Fayetteville. The jeweler recognized the 17-pound rock as one very large gold nugget and offered to buy it from John Reed for whatever price he wanted. John Reed, thinking it was only a just a pretty, shiny rock sold the rock for \$3.50 – which was then about week's wages, which was also one tenth of one percent of its real value of \$340. Today that same rock of gold would be worth about \$360,000.

I would guess that some of us today, upon hearing this story, got kind of a sinking feeling in our guts and wonder how incredibly ignorant it was of John Reed to sell a 17-pound gold rock for just \$3.50. And while we may think that the jeweler was a crook and a cheat, he knew true treasure when he saw it – so much so, that he had to have it and he offered John Reed whatever price John Reed wanted for that golden stone. John Reed held the same gold stone in his hands as the jeweler, but he failed to recognize its true value - and so his decision to sell the gold stone for far less, reflected what it was worth to him. That's the truth about everything in life - in that all of the decisions we make in life reflect what we value the most. This is also a biblical truth – in that all of the choices we make as born-again followers of Jesus Christ, reveal what we deem most worthy. All of our decisions and choices reflect what we truly worship. Our priorities and the commitments of our time and money echo what is preeminent in the depths of our hearts. In Matthew 6:21 Jesus put it this way: *“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

We see this in that everyone of us here today made a choice to come here. You could have spent the morning sleeping in, or you could have stayed home and watched a preacher on TV, or gone fishing and watch the sun rise. The weather prognosticators have promised us a beautiful day. You could have chosen to go to a cabin or take the kids to the lake or go shopping or attend some sort of sporting event. There are dozens and dozens of things to do on a Sunday rather than come to church and worship God. Yet, here you are, because you believe it's worth the time and the effort to worship our most sovereign God who mysteriously, by His abundant grace and undeserved mercy, loves us more than we could ever know. You are also here today because you know the joy and see the value of gathering together with God's people -in that the cost of spending your time here is no cost at all, because God is the treasure of our hearts. As Christians we are constantly faced and challenged with the question of how much our lives are we willing to give to God and live for God and be with God. But this isn't an issue for those who don't know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They see no value or worth in having a personal relationship with God, so they're not willing to give up their independence and surrender their hearts and lives to Jesus.

Sadly, this is not just an issue for those who don't believe in Christ. There are many who claim to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, but who are making decisions and choices that reveal that Jesus has little value or worth to them. There is no one description to define such people because, to some degree, we all wrestle with this. But, as we have already seen in God's Word, Jesus does not allow any wiggle room or middle ground to what he expects from those who truly follow him. In Luke 9:23-25 he declared: *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”* We tend to hear these words as being all about the pain of sacrifice and the struggle of suffering - but God's Word tells us that when God is the greatest and deepest and most preeminent treasure of our hearts - denying ourselves, taking up our crosses and following Jesus will be our greatest and deepest and most preeminent joy.

*Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Romans 5:1-5*

In our text for today Jesus tells us that if we are truly following him, we will do so because we are pre-eminently treasuring him over anything and anyone on earth. The context our text for this morning is first the Parable of the Sower (Mathew 13:1-23) which reflected how different people will respond to the Gospel of the Kingdom of God/Heaven when the Word of God is planted in their hearts, so that it would germinate and begin to grow. Last week Pastor Eric walked you through Matthew 24-43, where Jesus shared the Parable of the Weeds and the Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven, which reflected how the Kingdom of God is to grow. In our text for today Jesus uses another parable to tell us how we can know that the Gospel of the Kingdom of God is planted, growing and advancing in our hearts. Today Jesus continues builds on the concept of the “*kingdom of God/heaven*” by telling us in our text that those who discover the “*kingdom*” will find that the reign of Jesus Christ in their hearts and lives is so supremely valuable - that it is joyfully worth any cost or any price in this life, including life itself. Jesus is the “*treasure*” of the “*kingdom*” – and in our text for this morning, our Lord Jesus will reveal to us the joy and the sacrifice and the supreme worth of knowing Jesus as our Kingdom 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.” Matthew 13:44*

Burying your valuables, your treasures, in the ground might sound strange to us, but it was common practice in Jesus’s day. Today we put our money in a bank and we keep our valuables in a safe deposit box. But back in those days there were no banks or safe deposit boxes – especially for the common folk like you and me. And so, people back then often buried their money for safekeeping. This was especially true in Palestine because it was a place of frequent warfare, and many buried their valuables to protect them against any enemies who might raid their homes. Over the years, the ground of Palestine became an absolute treasure house. When the owner of a land that contained buried treasure died or was forcefully driven from the land, his valuables would be lost forever unless someone else discovered it. So, in those days, it wasn’t uncommon at all for a person who was plowing or digging in a field to accidentally come across a treasure. So, Jesus’ parable described an ordinary, reasonable situation.

Yet, there are some who look at this parable with great concern. At first glance, the man in the parable seems to be dishonest. Honest behavior would demand that this man tell the owner of the field about the treasure, since it was on his property and rightfully belonged to him. Yet historically that’s not necessarily true. Jewish rabbinic law said that “if a man finds scattered fruit or money, it belongs to the finder.” So those listening to this parable would not have perceived the man’s actions as unethical at all. If a man came across valuables that were obviously lost and whose owner was dead or unknown, the finder had a right to keep what was found -- even if it was found on someone else’s property!

And so, we can be assured that the man who found the treasure was honest in what he did – which means he didn’t have to buy the field. He could have just taken the treasure. But he didn’t. Instead he bought the field. In fact, he didn’t even cash in the treasure, so he had enough money to buy the field. Instead, he liquidated everything he owned to come up with the money. So, the man didn’t do anything unethical. But we need to be careful not to lose sight of the main point of the parable: The man found something so valuable that he sold everything he had to get it. He was so joyful about finding the treasure, that he was willing to do whatever he had to do in order to own it and enjoy it.

What is the “*treasure*” in this story? Well in the context of speaking of the “*kingdom*” – the “*treasure*” is Jesus himself. The “*treasure*” found in the “*kingdom of heaven*” is a personal relationship with the Son of God, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords of the universe, and all the benefits thereof: the forgiveness of sins, the filling of the Holy Spirit, a restored relationship with a holy God, eternal joy in His presence! God Himself is the “*treasure*” whom we “*find*” – by His calling us to Himself. God calls us to repentance, calls us to surrender to Him, calls us to relationship to Himself, and calls us to a community of God’s people. Jesus said: “*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*” (John 6:44). Sadly, many who claim to be called to Christ by God, still settle for much lesser treasures than Jesus, treasures that fall far, far short of “*the glory of God*” – by treasuring people, possessions and position more than the Son of God, the Spirit of God and the great God of all glory who is sovereign over and above all things.

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Jesus tells us here that an ultimate sacrifice is required in order for us to possess the greatest “*treasure*” in all of life. This is what the man in the parable does. He goes home, and he sells everything – *everything* – to buy the field. And he sacrifices everything – *everything he has* – not because he cares about the field but because of the “*treasure*” that is in the field. Now the point of parable is not that the “*kingdom*” can be bought. The paradox of the gospel is that while grace is completely free, it still costs us everything. There is a cost to salvation. It is at a great cost by God in that it cost Jesus his life on a cross – and there is also a cost to ourselves in our total commitment to live under submission of His Lordship as long as we live on this earth. Jesus calls us to do so by denying ourselves, taking up our crosses and following him.

Most of us in this room haven’t had to sacrifice very much of anything of great value in life. For us the Great Depression is just a story about something that happened a long time ago. Sacrifice for us is about giving up our cable TV or only having one car instead of two. We are spoiled because we’re used to having most things our way. And sadly, that attitude has deeply infected and tragically affected the church. We want all the blessings of the kingdom without the sacrifice it takes to gain them. The words of Jim Elliot are hollow today: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to get what he cannot lose.” The crux of what this missionary martyr is telling us is that someday everything we have in this world will be taken away from us, but what we gain through Christ in the kingdom of God will be ours forever.

When Jesus told his disciples that the only way they could enter the kingdom of God was by the way of sacrificial self-denial, Peter said: “*We have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?*” (Matthew 19:27). Jesus answered him by saying: “*Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life*” (Matthew 19:29). In essence, our Lord Jesus was saying to Peter: “What do you mean you’ve left *everything*? What am I? Peter if you haven’t come to me because I am a greater treasure than all those things you have left, then you really haven’t left anything at all. If you are struggling with giving up things up to follow me, then you’re still in love with your own selfish, self-centered self-sufficiency.” Jesus is either our greatest treasure or he is nothing at all. Paul spoke of the sacrifice for the treasure of the kingdom: “*Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. 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).

For most of us it is pretty hard to understand how someone could joyfully give up everything they possess. What would it mean for you to get rid of everything you own? Dump the cars, the house, the furniture, the boat, the clothes, the iPhone, the iPad, the computer, Netflix, the big-screen TV -- everything you own. Clear your calendar, schedule all your time for Jesus. Spend your vacation feeding the poor. Empty your life of you so that you might have all of Jesus. Get baptized, join the church, serve the church. How would it feel? If Jesus was your greatest treasure it would feel pretty good – because the kingdom of God/heaven isn’t about losing or suffering or getting the short end of the stick.

The kingdom of God/heaven is about making a killer deal. The kingdom of God/heaven is about trading hell for heaven. It's about trading death for life. It's about trading temporary trinkets for eternal riches, bondage for freedom, shame for joy, rejection for forgiveness. The kingdom of God/heaven is about trading fear, anger, bitterness and emptiness for a love and joy that never disappoints. The kingdom of God/heaven is an infinite treasure because the kingdom of God/heaven is all about treasuring Jesus.

The reality of all this is that we really have nothing to sacrifice. Everything we have that is not about God *is really nothing*. The first and greatest sacrifice we can ever make is to absolutely and completely resign ourselves, as saints who are still depraved sinners, to the grace and mercy of God, acknowledging that we bring nothing of value, nothing to merit His love, not one single good work that will put God in a position of obligation to us. We bring nothing to the table to negotiate with except our weaknesses, our failures, our inadequacies, our brokenness, our selfishness, our rebellion and our self-inflicted pain. We are but dust – we were created from dust and to dust we will return – and our time on earth is but a short span in between. We have nothing to offer God that gives any meaning to any kind of true sacrifice to God.

Yet Jesus demands that we sacrifice, that we give it all up for him: *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* What then is our Lord asking for? Well, the key to sacrifice – is joy: *"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."* For the surpassing worth of the treasure he found, the man sold all that he had to obtain that treasure with joy! True joy is not about us – it's about Jesus. *"For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 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 Corinthians 4:5-6).

Once you discover the kingdom of God/heaven - the reign of Christ in your heart and life - you will find Jesus so supremely valuable that you will joyfully sacrifice and give it all up *everything* for him. When you truly know the joy of Jesus you will not sacrifice or give begrudging with resentment or bitterness – but rather sacrificial giving will spring forth from a heart that delights to give it all up to gain what is otherwise impossible for us to obtain. When a man or woman or child discovers the treasure of the kingdom of God/heaven in Jesus – they discover incredible joy because the source of all true joy is God Himself. Zephaniah 3:17 tells us: *"The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing!"*

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The supreme worth of kingdom treasure is that God gives the gift of Himself as the one ultimate treasure in all the universe that has no limit. God is good beyond limit. God is holy beyond limit. God is full of grace and mercy beyond limit. God is King and Judge and Creator beyond limit. God is sovereign and omnipotent and omniscient and omnipresent beyond limit. God is glorious beyond limit. God is worthy beyond limit. God is a treasure far more valuable than anything or anyone in all the universe. In Psalm 96:1-6 the psalmist proclaims: *"Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary."* When we sacrificially embrace *the supreme worth of the kingdom treasure* that is found in Jesus Christ, we will experience three sources of joy:

1) *The joy of being restored back to our created relationship with God through salvation in Jesus Christ.* Psalm 51:12: *"Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit."* There is no greater joy than in knowing you are right before God through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2) *The joy of cross of Christ, that crucifies our sinful nature and opens up our hearts to the infilling of the Holy Spirit.* Galatians 5:22-26 tells us that, *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another."* When Jesus is your greatest treasure there is no room in your life for anger, bitterness, division, gossip, envy or conceit. A heart filled with the joy of the Spirit has no place for our *"sinful nature with its passions and desires."*

3) *The joy of experiencing God working through us, which produces more joy in Jesus.* In Luke 10 we read that Jesus sent seventy-two of his followers out into the world to share and spread the power of the gospel. When they returned, Luke 10:17 tells us: *"The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!'"* There is no greater blessing than to be joyfully known and used of God – or as the old tradition goes: God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him. *"For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy"* (Psalm 92:4).

I fear we've lost these kinds of joy in our day. We've lost the pure, simple joy of enjoying Jesus for who he is. When Isaiah predicted Israel's return from exile, he wrote: *"And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away"* (Isaiah 35:10). Brothers and sisters, we are the ransomed of the Lord, released from the exile of our sin and purchased by God Himself through the blood of Jesus Christ. That should be cause for joy and gladness – regardless our situation, circumstance, or feelings.

I've read this to you before, but it bears repeating. C.S. Lewis, in the words from his essay "The Weight of Glory" wrote: "The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contain an appeal to desire. If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

This is the struggle of our day. Consumerism has taught us not to value things too much, but to value things too little. We have forgotten how to treasure what is truly good, great and glorious. Entitlement has taught us that that "joy" means getting what we want – while the Bible teaches us that joy means Jesus giving Himself to us. God created us for Himself and not the other way around. The void we feel in our hearts and lives has nothing to do with how we feel or what we have or don't have. The void we feel in our hearts and lives is the personal need to be satisfied in God. This is reflected in a prayer Augustine once prayed to God: "You made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace till they rest in you."

God made us to hunger and thirst for Him. Mark Buchanan writes that: "He made us to yearn-to always be hungry for something we can't get, to always be missing something we can't find, to always be disappointed with what we receive, to always have an insatiable emptiness that nothing can fill and an untamable restlessness that no discovery can still. Yearning itself is healthy – a kind of compass inside us, pointing us to True North. It's not the wanting that corrupts us. What corrupts us is the wanting that is misplaced, set on the wrong thing. If we don't understand that, if we don't understand that God has set eternity in our hearts to make us heavenly minded, we skew or subvert the yearning and scatter it in a thousand wrong directions. We take a God-imparted hunger and send it out grubbing for meals. We twist our God-shaped passion for treasure hunting into rodent-like filching and scavenging. We shunt true longing into mere moping, zestful seeking into murmuring sullenness."

Job 5:7 says that *“man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.”* Job 14:1 tell us that life is but *“few of days and full of trouble.”* Life here on earth is fallen, broken, unfinished, ridden with struggle, infected with suffering, and permeated with loss. For the most part, we respond to our brokenness in pretty broken ways. As saved sinners that’s what we do best, you know. Yet Paul, in the words following his reflection on how we all share in the inner groaning of our fallenness with all of creation, then writes: *“For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience”* (Romans 8:24-25). Praise God for hope beyond this life. Praise God for Jesus. But Paul also knew, that right now, we are still here. So, then he wrote:

*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified”* (Romans 8:26-30)

Our greatest struggle in our walk with God on earth toward the Kingdom of God is ourselves. It should be easy if Jesus is truly personal and precious and powerful and preeminent in our hearts and lives. But it’s hard to deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow Jesus - when our hearts and our lives are so full of ourselves that there’s no room left for Jesus. Our greatest blind spot is that we take ourselves way too seriously and we don’t take God seriously enough – which causes us to treasure our own thoughts and ideas and feelings and emotions more than the God of all joy and glory who created us for Himself.

In Isaiah 55 God declares: *“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. . . . Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. . . . Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. . . . For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”* (Isaiah 55: 1, 3, 6-7, 12).

*“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.”* Brothers and sisters – Keep your eyes on Jesus. Buy the field! Give up all the cheap trinkets, sell out to Jesus - and buy the field! Jesus said: *“I will build my church”* but when we embrace Jesus as our greatest treasure, he uses us to build his church. A church built on anything or anyone else will ultimately fail, fall and fade away - but a church built on the reign of Jesus Christ in the hearts and lives of God’s people will defeat sin and death and stand forever.

Nehemiah once said: *“Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength”* (Nehemiah 8:10). In 2 Corinthians 6:10 Paul writes that those who follow Jesus will often be *“sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.”* In the kingdom of God/heaven we have a treasure in Jesus that assures us that there is always a sunrise after a sunset, always an empty tomb after a crucifixion, always a life to come after death. The Bible tells us that God, in His sovereignty, has chosen us to know *“the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory”* (Colossians 1:27). When Jesus is our greatest treasure – He will also be our greatest joy! Colossians 1:19-20 says: *“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”* He is worthy! Amen? Amen!