

# Trading for Treasure

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[ 0 : 00 ] I've told several people this, but I'm really thankful to be in a church week in and week out, where the gospel is proclaimed in the shape of our service.

! So, I have confidence that no matter what's said, you've already heard the gospel and heard Christ proclaimed.

But I hope you do hear more of Christ in the next season together. So, if you could turn to Matthew 13, 44 to 46.

That's going to be our text this morning. This takes place in Matthew 13. Jesus is teaching a series of parables in Matthew 13.

There's six parables he teaches, and they all have something to do with the kingdom of God, as Matthew says, the kingdom of heaven. So, let's read that together.

[ 1 : 17 ] Matthew 13, 44 to 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. Let's pray.

Father God, we ask for your help. We ask that we would know you through your word. We would really see you clearly. We ask that the Holy Spirit would help apply the word to our lives.

We wouldn't be people that just hear the word and then walk out of your church and forget what we've heard. But we would aim to apply your word to our lives. Pray you be gracious to us this way this morning.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, when I was coming through college, and as I say that, everyone starts to date me. I kind of hate giving dates to university students that I work with, because immediately what they do is they start thinking about how old they were when I start talking about something.

[ 2 : 29 ] And so about 20 years ago, or a little more, when I was in university, a game called Bigger or Better was something that was played fairly often on a university campus.

Basically, the game works like this. You guys are Team A. You're Team B. We give Team A a paper clip. We give Team B a pushpin. We give you three hours. And the rules of the game are you can't buy anything.

You can't use any money. You have to trade what you have and trade up and barter. And you have the time limit, and you come back. Whoever has the best item after three hours wins the game.

So a normal game of Bigger or Better, you guys might come back with a board game. You might come back with a rugby ball. The organizers of the game are going to declare a winner. It's a fun game. It requires social risk and interaction around the campus.

But in the early 2000s, a man named Kyle McDonald in Canada did his own game of Bigger or Better. And he started with a red paper clip. And after 12 months and 14 trades later, he came into the legal possession of a double-story home in Kipling, Canada.

[ 3 : 34 ] So you might want to try that if you want. But kudos for Kyle McDonald. I use this story not to be trivial about what Jesus says to his disciples, but to reinforce how he is encouraging them.

Following Jesus means a trade or an exchange. You're trading what you have for something you don't have. The kingdom of heaven will cost you everything, and yet in the end, it will be as if it cost you nothing.

Like Bigger or Better, you give up what you have in order to gain something of far greater value than what you gave up. So Matthew, in recording this, wants us to see the infinite value of the kingdom and the joyful response to that infinite value.

I think a quick word also before we get more in the meat of the text. This phrase, kingdom of heaven, can be maybe a little confusing. So if you read Matthew's gospel, he uses kingdom of heaven almost exclusively to describe the idea of Jesus' kingdom.

If you read other gospels, like Luke, Luke uses kingdom of God. So probably what happened is Jesus used both interchangeably, and that for whatever reason, Matthew latched onto kingdom of heaven, Luke latched onto kingdom of God.

[ 4 : 46 ] So there's an idea that can be used interchangeably. I think it's also helpful to look at church history and understand how the church has understood what we mean by kingdom. It's that the kingdom is the movement or the activity of Christ's spirit in the world, and that this movement is uniquely contained in the church.

So it's accurate to say that the church is the kingdom, but it's not the full extent of the kingdom. So kingdom, church is kingdom, but not the full extent of the kingdom. Chad Van Dixhorn, in his book *Confessing the Faith*, says it this way, it would be a mistake to wouldn't equate the kingdom of God with the church.

While the kingdom is not the church, the church is certainly the kingdom of Jesus Christ. So the idea is that the kingdom is contained here and also broader and beyond.

It's Jesus' activity in the world through his Holy Spirit. A former pastor of mine from the church that actually sent us to South Africa used to use this regular phrase when speaking about the kingdom, that the kingdom of God is greater than life, larger than self, and lasting forever.

And we see this taught in this chapter. We see these six parables. They don't all say the same thing. They're pointing at a reality around the kingdom. But the Bible is not simplistic or reductionistic in its language around the kingdom.

[ 5 : 57 ] Because the kingdom is expanding, it's vast, and one day it will encompass everything. So the thesis I'm after today is that the kingdom has infinite value, and that joy is the appropriate response to this infinite value of the kingdom.

So the first point, the kingdom has infinite value. Look again, let's just read it one more time because it was short. Matthew 13, 44 to 46. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field.

When a man found it, he hid it again, and then his joy went and sold all that 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. So these two stories, these three sentences, really make up one parable.

The treasure in the field and the pearl of great price. So it's really helpful to picture yourself as the man in the field. Maybe you're at work. Maybe you're just walking through a field. You bump into something.

[ 6 : 57 ] Maybe back in the day you were plowing. Your plow hits something. You think it's a stone. You get down, you start digging, and it's a box of buried treasure. So what do you do? Well, you need the field because you can't just steal the treasure because you need to own the field.

So you've got to urgently go and sell everything that you have. Now, this treasure far exceeds the value of everything you own or everything you ever could hope to own.

It even exceeds the value of thinking, well, if I bought the land, maybe I could start a business on the land. No, the value of this treasure is incalculable. It's an infinite, valuable treasure.

So put that in terms of your life today. You find, say you're walking through an empty lot in Mowbray or Observatory, kind of where I live, and you find a treasure and you don't want to steal, so you need to buy the empty lot.

You're out for a walk this afternoon. You come by my house. My sons are taking everything from my house out on the street and putting for sale. We're so urgently trying to get rid of things. We're flagging people down.

[ 7 : 59 ] We're like, you can take our couch. And, I mean, it costs a lot of money when we bought it, but you can have it for 300 grand. You know, like if you're selling things quickly, you've got to get rid of stuff at a discounted price.

You just don't get your money's worth. And then you come by and you ask me, what's going on?

And I tell you, well, I'm selling everything so I can buy an empty lot. And you kind of look at me and go, okay, that's a little strange.

Well, are you building a house on an empty lot? I haven't thought about it yet. Are you starting a business on an empty lot? No, I just, I haven't got that far.

I just urgently need to get rid of everything I have so I can buy the empty lot. And you're like, an observatory. Yeah. Like, at that point, you're calling your friends.

You're calling my friends. You're checking in. Like, James needs to go to the hospital. Something's wrong. But it's, you're urgently trying to dispose of what you have. And you're taking a loss on things in order to gain something of far more value.

[ 8 : 59 ] Jesus is telling this parable privately to his disciples. We see that if you glance back up in verse 36, you'll see that Jesus was teaching crowds. He leaves the crowds and he goes and teaches his, explains these previous parables to his disciples.

And then teaches his disciples with new parables. And this is one of them. I think that because he's teaching this to his disciples privately, it changes the scope of it.

Maybe a classic way we would understand this parable is like a parable about evangelism. Like, it's urgent that you do this. It's urgent that you come to faith. That, that is still true. I think that can still be applied this way.

But because he's teaching his disciples, I think he's aimed at encouraging his disciples. These are the people that have left their lives, their professions, and they're following this Jewish teacher around.

And he's encouraging them. He's reminding them that anything they've given up pales in comparison to knowing Jesus and his kingdom and following him.

[ 9 : 58 ] And we see this idea come up again and again and again in Matthew. So Matthew chapter 6, 16 and 19 specifically, it comes up. So how is this designed to encourage the disciples?

Well, the same way it should encourage you. Many of you are like the first man. You weren't looking for a treasure. You were just minding your own business. And you found the kingdom.

You saw the beauty of what was on offer in the gospel. And you recognized you had a choice. You could either be king of your own kingdom or let Jesus be king and be part of his kingdom.

Others of you were like the second man. You were actively seeking, diligently inquiring, asking questions, and considering. And when you found what you were looking for, you also traded the things you once held as a treasure to make Jesus your treasure.

Like the disciples, you left your former way of life to follow Jesus and be part of his kingdom. But now, if you're honest, you have days that are hard. You have days where you wonder, did I really make the right decision?

[ 11 : 01 ] Is it really worth it? I think when following Jesus gets difficult, we often play a game of what if. What if I had made different decisions? I don't know about you, but in my, when I have those moments in my alternate universe, everything goes right.

Every decision I have ever made works out perfectly. And I always have more money. I'm always happier. I've always created better opportunities for my family.

And everyone's always healthy. Like, I know how to run my universe. Thank you very much. Like, sometimes I feel like you could do a better job, right? If we're honest, we feel that way. And this verse is encouraged to remind us that that's not true.

That what I think I would have gained, it's really an illusion. It's smoke. It's nothing you can grasp onto. It is nothing compared to the infinite worth of knowing, worth of the kingdom and knowing Jesus as king.

Jim Elliott, the missionary to Ecuador, who was speared to death during some of his first contacts with the Harani people, wrote this. He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

[ 12 : 08 ] Say it again. He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. Or rather, what Jesus says in Matthew 16, verse 24, Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me.

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

The infinite value of the kingdom is linked to the infinite value of the king. Just this week, I was in my own personal devotions, looking at different psalms, and over and over and again, the majesty that is displayed in the psalms of God, the creator.

That as Jesus spoke the universe into existence, stars were born that are so large that if they were in the place of our sun, their extent would be where Jupiter is.

And that's a really, really long ways away. Like, it's a huge star. And yet, also, every single day, millions of babies are born.

[13:22] New life is brought in the world. And every single day, people are brought from death to life in Jesus. Miracles are continuing to happen. Jesus is working over and over and over again. Our king has infinite value.

And therefore, the kingdom, his kingdom, also has infinite value. We also see this is a kingdom, Hebrews speaks about this in chapter 12, that cannot be shaken. It will never go away.

The kingdom's of infinite value. And what you could possess or hope to possess in wealth, prestige, or relational comforts, against the infinite value of the kingdom of God is nothing.

So, again, the kingdom has infinite value. My second point is this, that its appropriate response to infinite value of the kingdom is joy. So, joy is the only appropriate response to the infinite value of the kingdom.

Before moving on and kind of fleshing out this point a little bit, I want you to imagine something with me. So, I want you to hear this, how maybe the disciples would have heard it, or put yourself in a situation where they would have received this teaching.

[14:28] So, I like to go camping. Many of you might like to go camping. Maybe camping's not your thing, okay? But I like to go camping because I'm away from my current responsibilities.

I'm away from the ebb and flow of life. Life just slows down. Like, there's no electricity. Stars are out. I can't stream anything. There's no podcast. I'm not hearing anything else.

Wherever that place is for you, I want you to think about that place. So, it might be a village back where you're from. It might be a farm. It might be, I know some of us do this, probably once a week, drive around and just like sit on a rock on the Atlantic coast near the ocean.

It's quiet. All we hear are the waves lapping. That's the situation in which the disciples heard Jesus' teaching. They didn't leave Jesus' teaching and put a podcast on and play it on the way home.

There was no other stimuli in their minds. So, they've heard Jesus teaching all day about the kingdom publicly. Then, Jesus does several hours of teaching and discussion with his disciples.

[15:31] Maybe that night at dinner, they're talking about what Jesus was teaching. As they're falling asleep, they're thinking about what Jesus was teaching. And I want to argue that if you want to apply the scriptures to your life, you need to do what the disciples did, which is put God's word primary as a primary stimulus in your life.

As they're falling asleep, they're thinking about his words. They're pondering, they're considering, they're wondering, does my life and my aims and hopes and ambitions, does it match up or line up with what Jesus was just talking about?

What we spent our day doing. I think we really would value from the same thing of slowing down, of turning some things off, giving time to consider, does our life line up with what Jesus is teaching?

So again, the point here, joy is an appropriate response to the infinite value of the kingdom. We see in verse 44, the man joyfully sold what he had.

And then again in verses 45 and 46, the merchant's job was to search for pearls. Do you think he found the one pearl he really, really wanted, and then he reluctantly gave up everything else?

[16:40] No, no, he was like, I'm selling it and I'm happy when I'm selling it and I'm happy when I'm buying the one pearl of great value. Now this is really easy to prove. When you find something of value, you do everything in your power to have it.

You do not undertake a task begrudgingly. One place we often see this played out is relationships. It's quite magical actually. Before you get in a relationship, time is limited, resources are tight, all of a sudden you're in a relationship and you've got lots of resources and time to spend on and with that person, right?

My wife and I were talking about this last night even and talking about running things like triathlons or marathons and it's like, yeah, people pay money to do that.

People pay money to go suffer. They give time and money to it. I was reflecting on this in my own life. My matric year of high school, Kelly and I were dating and one of my best friends in high school, he'd always joke, he's like, so Kelly was in town this weekend?

I'm like, yeah, how'd you know? He goes, because you didn't call me. You didn't talk to me. It's like, yeah, I didn't have all the time in the world for my best friend, but I had all the time in the world for

Kelly when she was in town.

[ 18 : 00 ] So it's easy to prove that you joyfully give up. When you want something else, you joyfully give up in order to have that thing. So how do you know you've seen the kingdom?

How do you know you've really seen the hope held out for you in the gospel? Your response to that offer is joy. Over the years, I've sat with many students and many other people and a question that often will come up is, well, I'm a student now, I'm 19, 20 years old, like can't I just become a Christian when I'm older?

Not a bad question. I mean, it's good to talk about. And I'll give you my answer. I just tell them, no, you can't. And there's a whole list of reasons why.

The one, let me be crystal clear about this. One reason is not that God's grace is not sufficient. God's grace is always on offer when you repent and turn to him. There's a whole other reasons why my answer is no.

I won't get into now. If you want to talk to me after the service, that's fine. But I think the fundamental problem with that question is that people who ask the question haven't really seen the value of the kingdom. So my advice to that person is, well, the answer is no.

[ 19 : 12 ] And I actually think this is what you need to continue to do. You need to be like the second person, the merchant looking for fine pearls. You need to continue to search and continue to inquire. Like, come to church.

Keep talking to friends. Keep reading the scriptures. Keep pursuing, and let's just see what happens. In this parable, Jesus is saying you could have everything you ever wanted, but it would be nothing compared to what's extended to you in the gospel.

So this question, can I just wait till I get older, is presumed that a life of following Jesus is of less value or less importance or less significance than the theoretical life you might construct for yourself.

It's an accusation against Christianity on something like, Christianity is restrictive and restrictions are bad. When you pause and consider your life and consider the infinite value of the kingdom and the comparable worth that you possess, the only response is to joyfully give all that you have.

If you find yourself in stages of negotiating with God, so if you've never come to faith in Christ and you're negotiating with God, or you've been a Christian for a long time and now things have cropped up and you're kind of having negotiations with God, you either haven't seen or are not currently seeing the value of the kingdom.

[ 20 : 24 ] If we pause and consider what Jesus is saying to us and what is offered, we will gladly give up being the center of our lives and rather have Jesus as king. The nature of the kingdom of God is that you're willing to give up everything in order to follow Jesus.

If there's anything keeping you from having that joy, then this parable commends us to give it up as soon as possible. Jesus is not a cosmic killjoy.

We see quite the opposite in scriptures. We see that Jesus says, I have come to give you, to give us abundant life. It's actually the work of the devil to kill, steal, and destroy.

If you want a happy life, you want a holy life. You want to follow hard after Jesus. Coming to Jesus is like signing a blank contract. I actually have a friend who did this his first year of university.

He encountered the claims of Jesus his first semester at university. His life was a wreck. He was living for himself and he was miserable. He was home by himself over Christmas break. He went into his room and he wrote on a blank sheet of paper, my life to the Lord, and put his name, left the page blank, and then signed it.

[ 21 : 41 ] I'm like, that's just such a beautiful picture of what it means to be a Christian. It's God, I'm giving, here's the contract to my life. It's blank. You get to fill in the details.

T's and C's, they're yours. What might God be asking you to joyfully give up in order to gain the kingdom?

For some of you, you've never really come to Jesus. You've never come confessing sin and in need of a savior. There needs to be a first confession that you're ready for Jesus to be your king and give up trying to rule your own life and to make a life apart from God, to have real life in Jesus.

This was what happened to me. I was 14 years old. I had seized, a couple years before that, I'd started reading the Bible and kind of had stopped really seeking the kingdom, looking for life.

I was confronted with the reality that I didn't know God and I was away at the beach. I just remember going out and walking down the beach by myself, kneeling down in the sand and praying

very simple prayer.

[ 22 : 50 ] God, I do not know you. I want to know you and you can do whatever you want with my life. So I came to him and he's been incredibly faithful. Many of you are like the disciples.

You have already done that. You've already given up everything to follow Jesus, but you need to be encouraged that what you once gave up is worth it. So I have some applications here for a few people.

I'll say this about applications. I had, when I wrote these applications, I thought about myself. I wasn't thinking about any of you. So if any of you, this lands with any of you in a particular way, just know I was thinking about me.

It's not about you. It's about me, okay? But you can apply these to yourself. First, I want to speak to kids in school. Does your reputation among your school friends matter more to you than anything else?

Are you resistant to input and advice from your parents? These are signs or symptoms that something else is more important to you than Jesus as your king and following him in his kingdom.

[ 23 : 56 ] University students, most of you are under immense pressure. There's family pressure to perform well academically. I know that many of you, your families are relying on you to make it, to help provide for the family.

There's social pressure that comes from the university environment that to seem like something, to have an appearance on social media, matters more than actually to be something. And that puts immense pressure on you.

So, you need to at least have the appearance of studying all the time. But no one can study all the time. So, you doom scroll in your room for three hours and then you stop doing that and you feel more burdened and more stressed.

I think following Jesus as king means living in light of the wisdom that he provides in his word. To work diligently, to sleep, to have friends, and to be open-handed with your future, knowing that he cares for you.

Those of us that are out and working, we likely have patterns and habits in our lives that are contrary to the kingdom and need to be addressed. What we spend time and money on reveals a lot about what we're pursuing.

[ 25 : 05 ] Does your time and money reveal that you are aimed at generosity? Are you able to stop working, stop worrying, knowing that Jesus is king and he keeps watch over you? Are you able, are you able, if you're a parent, are you able to look past the lots of little irritating things that your kids do?

Okay? Are you able to look at them and speak words of affirmation to them, knowing that when God looks at you, he affirms you as a son or daughter? I'm praying, without apology and without qualification, that God would raise up missionaries in our midst.

Maybe some students maybe some of you. In 20 years from now, I'm praying that we are just not a church that helps plant more churches, but we're sending cross-cultural missionaries to people groups in Africa and beyond.

A church planting movement that sends out missionaries, supports theological development, helps its people engage in balanced gospel ministry, helping to bring justice to the most vulnerable among us, will require a people who have joyfully traded being the king of their own kingdom for Jesus to be their king and to live for his kingdom purposes.

And don't you realize, like, no matter what you possess, no matter what you hope to possess, you're going to have to let go of it. When we set ourselves up as our rulers of our own little kingdoms, our kingdoms will crumble and they will come to an end.

[ 26 : 33 ] When we die, the Bible speaks about in very clear terms that we must give an account for our life to God. Refusing to have Christ as king is like free-falling and grasping for something to hold on to, something that you hope will give you life and there's nothing there.

If you choose to build your kingdom, you will lose it anyway. And I am not interested in temporary gains. I'm interested in a kingdom that has no end and has an infinite value.

Let me conclude with this thought. Our motivation to trade what we have for the true treasure of the kingdom is when we realize that we are the treasure that was sought by Jesus.

Jesus, the Son of God, has been promised a gift from all eternity and we are that gift. The eternal Son asked for children that he could gaze upon with pleasure for all of his days.

We who are fearful and timid and complaining and ungrateful are the children of God. We are Jesus' treasure. King Jesus and his kingdom have infinite value.

[ 27 : 41 ] There is nothing in the world that anyone can build their life on that can bear the weight of their soul. There is no job, no amount of wealth, no power, no leisure, no relationship that can give you meaning and purpose.

There is only one person and that is the King Jesus and he has a kingdom that is greater than self, larger than life and lasting forever. Let's pray. Father God, we pray that you would help us to apply your word.

We pray that you would be our treasure and that we would know you and that Jesus being our treasure and us being in his kingdom would transcend every part of our lives that whatever we do, our work, our family relationships, our hobbies, our interests, all of them would be transformed by the reality of the kingdom of God.

We just pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.