

Life-Giving Lesson:

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Matthew 13:44-46 NIV

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44 "The kingdom of heaven is like 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.

45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Have you ever had an Antique Road Show moment? You're familiar with the program on public television? They bring a boat load of noted appraisers in a variety of fields, and a film crew to a city like Seattle. Members of the public buy a ticket and bring an item to be appraised. An Antique Road Show moment is like one of the following:

An aspiring artist paid \$10. for a large canvas at his local Goodwill, with the intention of painting over the canvas. However, prompted by a friend's suggestion, the buyer searched online and found that he was now the proud owner of a color block painting titled "Vertical Diamond" by a notable abstract Russian painter Ilya Bolotowsky. The canvas is valued at over \$6000!

A British art collector paid \$5. For a sketch he found at a Las Vegas garage sale in 2010. The drawing, believed to depict 1930s singer Rudy Vallee, was created by ten year old Andy Warhol. Its appraised value? Over 2 million dollars!

What were we thinking as we drove by that garage sale?? What's the hurry??

You know that gosh-awful-ugly vase that belonged to Great Aunt Maude? The one that only sees the light of day..., well, never. So you put it in the donation box last year and...

A brother and sister in England were cleaning out their deceased parents' home when they discovered such a vase. But instead of tossing it, they had

it appraised. Come to find out, it was an 18th century Qianlong-dynasty porcelain piece valued at slightly over 1 million dollars. However it sold at auction to a Chinese investor for...\$85 million!

Who knew a vase—a child's drawing—a canvas--anything could be so valuable?

More to the point...How do we assign value to almost anything?

There is sentimental value, then there is the actual cost of something.

Remember the old television commercials that would add up the cost of say, a bouquet of helium balloons, a birthday cake and a rent-a-clown, and then declare that the experience of throwing a surprise party was "priceless"? It was an advertisement for MasterCard!

Indeed, some things *are* priceless! But how do we determine which is indeed, worth 1.99 at the thrift store, and which is a priceless relic or antique?

Who decides?

By what criteria does one evaluate and discern such things?

This is one of the fundamental tasks in life, because ultimately we organize our lives around what we value. It is to this end that Jesus tells these two brief parables about the Kingdom of God.

In the first, the treasure is there all along, it is simply hidden from view.

Given the location of Palestine, it was the crossroads between Europe, Asia and Africa. In addition to trade, invading armies would traverse it's soil too. Lacking secure banking options, it was common when faced with an advancing enemy, for folks to bury or hide their valuables in the ground with the intention of returning later to unearth them. Perhaps this is how the treasure came to be found in this field.

Having discovered such a cache, this man reburied the treasure, since he had no right to it while the land belonged to another. He rushed off and with JOY sold everything he had, and bought the land.

The grandfather of a childhood friend of mine, did not trust banks. Instead, gramps rolled up cash, stashed it in coffee cans, which he then hid in holes that he dug underneath his house.

The family had their suspicions, so after grandfather died, the grandsons took shovels down into the crawl space. They unearthed about a dozen such coffee cans, and while some of the bills had started to deteriorate, the US Treasury was obliged to replace each of those bills with new ones, to the tune of over \$35,000!

Pearls, much more than diamonds, were known and highly valued in the ancient world. It is said that Cleopatra, the famous Egyptian princess, owned one pearl worth then, 25 million denarii, a denarii being the equivalent to a day's wage. One can only imagine what it might be worth today!

Jesus says a businessman is searching for pearls, and finds the cream of the crop, the best of the best, the sort of pearl that dealers dreamt of getting their hands on. In order to buy it he, like the man finding buried treasure, sold all that he had in order to possess this one pearl.

In the first parable, the man comes upon the treasure unexpectedly. In the second, the man is searching for it. What is significant is that both have in common the idea of discovering something of tremendous value, and the willingness to sell out—no matter the cost—to give up everything--in order to obtain either the pearl or the treasure.

Let's be clear: Salvation or participation in the Kingdom that Jesus inaugurates, is not something for which one can buy a ticket. Jesus makes it clear that there are demands involved with discipleship, but this is not something negative. Indeed it is something positive! One may indeed have to give up or make some changes in one's lifestyle or priorities, but the parable teaches that this will be more than worth what it "costs" us! Jesus calls us to incalculable gain and inexpressible joy!

The apostle Paul says it this way in Philippians 3:7-11NLT

⁷I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. ⁸Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ ⁹and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ.^[c] For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, ¹¹so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

Paul puts the value of knowing Christ and the joy of this salvation in the context of eternity. (v.8)

And in 2 Corinthians 4 he does it again, but puts our daily trials and troubles in an eternal context again:

¹⁶ That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are^[e] being renewed every day. ¹⁷ For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! ¹⁸ So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

These parables present the Kingdom of Heaven as something exciting and valuable: Discovering it is the equivalent of finding true treasure. It is a matter of unspeakable joy! Perhaps you've seen an episode of Antique Road Show when an appraiser informs the owner that the vase belonging to Great Aunt Maude is really worth a significant sum? Often the person is incredulous! It is too good to be true! The person laughs nervously, in disbelief. Is it really happening? Joy is illusive...

In the parable of the pearl, the treasure is not hidden, and in fact the person is seeking, looking for it. The Kingdom of God is not obvious to all, because not all have "eyes to see and ears to hear", according to Jesus. In spite of many signs and wonders that Jesus performed, and in addition to his teaching, the Kingdom of God often did not match up with the expectations of some. Some recognize and accept Jesus' true identity, and some do not. This was true during Jesus' earthly ministry, it is true today.

These two little parables focus on the inestimable value of the Kingdom of God. The hidden treasure emphasizes that the Kingdom has a value that far outweighs what anyone looking in a field might have expected.

The parable of the costly pearl emphasized that the well-trained expert will discover that nothing compares to the worth of the reality of the Kingdom.

Whatever cost a person expends is nothing in comparison to the benefit of becoming a part of the Kingdom of God. Salvation and the righteousness of the Kingdom is a greater treasure than all the world has to offer, and the source of greatest joy!

Any sacrifice we make pales in comparison to the sacrifice Jesus made so that you and I can enter the Kingdom of God! And the joy of knowing Jesus

Knowing how greatly we are loved,

Knowing that Jesus died and rose again in order to purchase our freedom/salvation,

Knowing all of this should indeed, be the source of Incredible JOY !

Skye Jethani tells this story about playing play hide-and-seek with his two and a half year old daughter Zoe:

Sometimes she hides, but usually the game involves hiding my cell phone. Unfortunately she doesn't yet understand the object of the game. She makes me close my eyes—that much she gets. But it's downhill from there.

First of all, she always hides my phone in the same place: on the stairs, in plain sight. No matter how many times we play, she always puts my phone on the stairs. When I open my eyes, I know my phone is on the stairs, but I'll pretend like I don't see it. I'll look on the sofa, or under the table. It's my way of trying to teach her what the point of the game really is. What I've ended up teaching Zoe is that her father is a complete idiot, because the moment I look somewhere else for the phone she says, "No, Daddy. The phone isn't there. It's on the stairs, silly goose." And then she rolls her big brown eyes at me. There's nothing like having your intelligence insulted by a two-year-old.

I've been trying to show Zoe that the fun of hide-and-seek is the seeking. But for Zoe, no matter what I try, the *fun part is always the finding*.

God wants us to seek him. But, like Zoe, God understands that the real joy is not in seeking, but in finding. God wants to be found.

God has not intended the Christian life to be an impossible hunt for an elusive God that requires enormous faith. Quite the contrary. The Christian life is a simple walk to a welcoming God who requires only child-like faith. Whether in the seeking but mostly in the finding or being found—there is great JOY!