
**“Placing Value on the Invaluable”
(Matthew 13:44-46)
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Introduction:

When describing something of great importance and of some complexity, it will take some time and a good number of words to get the image across. Often times, a single image won't do it justice. Say you describe your girlfriend or your wife. What images, what words would you use? Could a single image capture all that she is? What if you just showed a picture of her face? What response would you get? Surely you wouldn't expect, “Wow, she's a real caring person.” Of course not. Rather you'd expect something like, “She's beautiful. She has amazing eyes.” But you wouldn't be able to capture her personality, her strengths, her fears, or her character from just a picture.

I recently had the chance to describe my wife to a group of people who had never met her before and I remember saying something like this. “I really thank God for my wife, because she is high capacity and low maintenance.” And for whatever reason I was really appreciative of these qualities in my wife. And the people around the room started chuckling. And it was a pretty serious sharing moment and I was like, why are they laughing? And I realized that the words I used for her were the words most people would have used to describe their vacuum cleaner or lawnmower or washing machine. That was totally not the image I was after. I was just trying to describe how God blessed me with a wonderful wife at and that moment, those were the qualities I appreciated.

Well, so it is with the Kingdom of God. To describe this incredible thing called the Kingdom of God, Jesus uses a variety of metaphors that usually begin with the words “the Kingdom of God is like” or “the Kingdom of Heaven is like”. And as he describes the Kingdom pulls from the world of agriculture, labor, business, biology, baking, fishing, ranching, marriage, and other common areas of life.

Today's parable or metaphor is no different. Here, Jesus uses a couple metaphors to get a certain image or message across about the Kingdom. And with the use of these metaphors he wants to get across to his listeners this point. **The Kingdom of God is immeasurably valuable.**

Three things first.

1. KoH and KoG are synonymous terms. Matthew uses the former, the other gospels use the latter.
2. KoH and KoG refer to the rule and reign of God in this world, more than it refers to a place. And I suppose with the phrase, KoH, we can be misled to think that the KoH must be in Heaven. But that's not what Jesus is getting at. Think of the Lord's Prayer. Jesus prays, “Your Kingdom Come. Your Will be done.” How does the next line go? **“On earth as it is in heaven.”** In what realm does God rule w/o any opposition to his sovereignty? Heaven. Earth is the place where human beings are in rebellion to the rule and reign of God. Earth is the place to which he sent his Son to usher in His reign. Make sense? So 1. KoH, KoG are synonymous, and 2. It's about the rule and reign of God, not a particular place.

3. One last thing. The KoG has both a present and a future component. Some scholars thought that the Kingdom of God was only to be realized in the **future**, at the end of the age, when Christ returns and vanquishes all evil. And others thought that Jesus must have meant that it would be realized **here and now** on earth. Why the confusion? How could there be such a difference in opinion among scholars? Well, for a singular reason. Jesus mentions both. He mentions the future aspect of the KoG and he mentions the present aspect of the KoG. Then scholars did this amazing thing and said, "It must mean both! It's both present and future." The KoG is already here. It was ushered in when Jesus came. "The Kingdom of God is upon you." Jesus said those words himself. But the Kingdom of God has not fully been realized because evil still exists in this world and will continue to exist until Christ returns when all evil is destroyed. So to the phrase scholars used to describe this dual nature of the Kingdom of God was, "Already, not yet." It's already here, but not yet completely. Make sense?

And we see that to be true don't we? Do we see some signs that God has 'broken into' this world—penetrated with his love, rule and influence? Absolutely. The presence of the church. The presence of his Son. The presence of his Spirit. Christians moving to and fro, taking his gospel to the farthest corners of the globe.

What about the "not yet" portion? The same. As we said there are places in this city and in this world and in our lives, where Jesus is not King. And so the Christian labors to make that more of a reality today than it was yesterday. And the Christian longs achingly for the day, when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and King.

Okay, that was Kingdom of God 101. Now, back to today's parables. **The Kingdom of God is immeasurably valuable.** Let's read it.

TNIV Matthew 13:44-46

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.

The basic structure of these two parables goes like this.

- A. A person discovered something, a treasure, of immeasurable value.**
 - B. The same person sold everything they had in order to obtain that treasure.**
 - C. So is it with the Kingdom of Heaven.**
- (repeat)

Each of these simple parables have their distinctives as well, but that's the general structure and point of these two parables.

Let's look at the first one.

The KoH is like is like a situation where a person, probably a farmhand, shepherd or laborer was working in a field that belonged to his employer or master.

In ancient times before the advent of the bank, people had to resort to creative means to protect their wealth from bandits and thieves. So it wasn't uncommon for people, whether wealthy people or soldiers who had just looted a village, to bury their treasure, and the only person to know about it was the person who buried it. And you can imagine that it wouldn't be uncommon for these

folks to die for whatever reason and the knowledge of the existence and location of the treasure would be lost forever. So to come across a treasure like this would have been like coming across the proverbial needle in a haystack—something that might happen once in a thousand lifetimes. Something like winning the lotto today.

In the second parable, we have a merchant of fine jewels. I think it's safe to assume that this person knows his stuff. He can spot the difference between cubic zirconia and a real diamond. He can tell if it's just a shiny round white rock or if it's a genuine pearl. This is his job. This is how he makes a living. He's one of the experts on the antique road show telling you that the family heirloom is actually a fake. And this merchant goes from town to town, from market to market, from dealer to dealer, and comes across the **mother of all pearls**. He found a pearl like none he has ever seen. He considers all the years of travel, and the thousands of pearls he has seen with his eyes and rolled in his finger and held up to the light, and he has seen none like this one.

Friends, I want to ask you a question. Does your experience as a Christian, in finding God, in accepting Christ, in receiving forgiveness and salvation, in being assured eternal life, in discovering your true identity and calling...compare and resonate with either or both of these stories?

Was your stumbling across Christ, was your moment of awakening, ring of something like what's been described in these two parables?

If you were to finish the sentence, "Being a Christian is like..." or "Knowing God is like..." or you get to write your own parable, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like...", how would you finish the sentence.

Being a Christian is like being in love.

Being a Christian is like wandering in a desert under the scorching sun, on your hands and knees, sand covering every inch of my skin, and I look up and there before me is an oasis, where there is cool, spring-fed, refreshing water.

Being a Christian is like living your whole life as an orphan with amnesia, not knowing who in the world you are, not knowing your history or your family, not even knowing your name. And you live life trying to please this person and that person, all the while searching for your true identity. And then finally it happens, after years and years of searching, not just you searching for him, but him searching for you, you and your Father find each other.

Being a Christian is like that scene in the movie The Mission, where Robert Deniro plays a mercenary who killed his own brother in a jealous rage and a priest played by Jeremy Irons offers him the chance to pay for his sins. And he pays by following the priest through the thickest densest jungle, swimming through rivers and climbing slippery rocks and cliffs, to reach the natives to share with them the love of God, all the while, pulling behind him a huge burden, a roped sack, full of his armor and helmet and sword, the memory of his past. And he reaches a point, at the top of a precipice, where the sack gets wedged between two rocks and almost pulls him back down the face of the cliff and he is literally stuck. He has no more strength, he can go no further.

And then one of the natives of the tribe he used to hunt and kill, grabs his machete. And you think at that moment that he might use the machete to take revenge on the mercenary, but instead what does he do? He hacks at the rope, until the rope is cut and the bag of armor plummets hundreds of feet into the canyon, into the river below. And you have the unforgettable image of Robert Deniro, on his hands and knees, face and body covered in mud, weeping and weeping.

What's your metaphor? What's your story? Does it ring of extravagance and insanity? Do people say you're crazy? That's what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. It's priceless.

What should be the response to this great discovery?

In the first story with the treasure in the field, the response is joy. In both stories a decisive action is taken. But before the decisive action, there is calculation.

In the first story, in order to own the treasure, you have to own the field. It's as if you were a home-renovator working on someone's attic and you come across what you know to be a priceless Picasso. And as far as you know, the owner has no idea that stuff is up there. So you put in an offer for the home.

So the worker in the field he sells everything he has, totals the money and purchases the field, to get the treasure.

The second person, the merchant, also took decisive and radical action. The pearl might not be there forever. Someone else might come by and purchase it for themselves. So he went home, gathered up all of his assets, sold it all, and went back to purchase the pearl.

In both cases, they are not rash decisions made on a whim. They are not stupid investments. They are not poor business transactions. In both cases there is no risk. There are no odds. It's a no-brainer. Both of them sold all they had to purchase a priceless treasure. The treasure was worth more than all either of them had. And both of them went to extremes to obtain the treasure.

Of course the Kingdom of Heaven cannot be purchased with money. It is a gift from God. It is a present and future reality. But given that, each of us must make a decisive and radical decision to accept it and embrace it. We must ask ourselves: Do I treasure the rule and reign of God in my life and in this world? Do I want to be a citizen in His Kingdom? Will I give up all to see the Kingdom of God become a reality, in my family, at my work, in St. James Town, in Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Cambodia? To do so, is in fact the best, the most logical, the wisest decision a person could make.

For many people, they come across this incredible treasure, "The rule, the reign of Almighty God in love and justice for all eternity, in heaven and on earth." **And he asks us, "You want in?"**

And we **yawn**. We say, I'd rather buy a car. I'd rather play video games. I'd rather go shopping. Listen to how C. S. Lewis describes this attitude from his book, *The Weight of Glory*.

"Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward [in this case the Kingdom of Heaven] 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 around with

drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” (p. 26)

Man!, is that not true with us, with people today? We are far too easily pleased. You and I, we weren't made for the temporal. God created us for the eternal and here we are, duped into believing that this is as good as it's gonna get.

Friends, being a citizen of the Kingdom, being a Christian, being a follower of Christ, has always, always been about giving up and forsaking all others for a singular pursuit of Christ and his Kingdom.

The original disciples, all of them, left everything and followed Jesus.

Jesus said, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even life itself—such a person cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:26.

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. Luke 9:23.

Conclusion:

Friends, as a Christian, what should be to us of utmost importance? The answer: whatever is of utmost importance to God. What is it that I should treasure most? That which God treasures most.

As John Piper says, God treasures most himself. Not to do so would make God an idolater. So we too must treasure and live for God and his Kingdom.