

Matthew 13:44-46

Let me ask what is the most valuable thing you have?

Is it a painting, some jewellery – I understand the price of gold is about £1100 an ounce - your house – or mortgage, your bank balance, your car, what is it?

Peter in his letters speaks of “your faith— of greater worth than gold” (1 Peter 1:7) and “To those who through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours” (2 Peter 1:1).

Peter would have answered that his faith is the most precious, the most valuable thing he has. So do you want to revise your answer to the question what is the most valuable thing you have?

In these two parables that formed part of our reading for today, Matt 13:44-46, Jesus also spoke about the value of faith.

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure” (Matt 13:44) and “the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value”(Matt 13:45-46).

What Jesus was clearly saying is that the Kingdom of heaven is like treasure, is of great value.

What Jesus means by Kingdom of heaven is to live with him as King. That is to have changed from living with ourselves as rulers of our lives and allowed him to be ruler.

To do this, to come under his loving rule and live as a child of God, is to be in the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of heaven and that is of great value.

The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure, is of great value. Is that how you see it? In part just having made the effort to be here this morning suggests that you do.

Let me ask what do the following people have in common. Saint Matthew, Ignatius of Antioch, Joan of Arc, Hugh Latimer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Janani Luwum?

These are all Christian martyrs, people for whom their faith, being part of God’s kingdom, was more important than life itself. Paul knew this as he wrote to the Philippians, “I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far”. (Phil 1:23)

This is the bottom line of our passage today that there is nothing more valuable than to be in a relationship with Jesus Christ. The kingdom of heaven is of great value.

1. For those not yet in the Kingdom of Heaven.

If you are listening to this either here in church or on the download and you are thinking but I am not yet a follower of Jesus and so not yet in the Kingdom of heaven, then I think these verses say three things to you. Have a look at the verses with me, v44 “When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field” and then v46, “When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

Can you see the three things that are repeated in the two verses – found, sold and bought?

a. seek the kingdom

In v44 we see how a man “found” this treasure in a field. The man was probably a labourer working in his master’s field when he stumbled across the treasure. It happens in real life doesn’t it? Back in April last year it was reported in the press how an Austrian man was digging in his garden to extend a pond and came across a treasure of rings brooches and other stuff that was 650 years old.

However the merchant was much more deliberate. He went looking for pearls but perhaps was not expecting what he found. Similarly in 2009 Terry Herbert went searching for treasure with his metal detector and in a Staffordshire field he dug up the UK’s largest haul of Anglo-Saxon treasure a collection of 1,500 gold and silver pieces, which may date to the 7th Century and worth over £3 million.

So in a sense it is possible to stumble over the truth of the Kingdom of heaven. However many come into God's Kingdom having made a search. The existence of the many Alpha and Christianity Explored course show this. So if you are here and are yet to come to faith the fact that you are here would suggest you are searching for faith and I would encourage you to keep searching, to ask the questions, to read the documents because there is nothing more valuable than to be in a relationship with Jesus Christ. But if these two men were seekers when they found the treasure they did something else

b. sell

The first man, if he was a labourer, would not have been rich but recognising the value of what he had discovered. He went off and sold everything so that he could buy the field and so make the treasure his. The Merchant v46 having found this pearl of great price went away and sold everything so that he could own the pearl.

We are used to the idea of giving up some things for something that is better or more important. You parents may have given up a night by the fire to drive your children to see friends, or perhaps there has been a concert you have wanted to go to and spent hours on the net trying to get them to say nothing of the expense and effort of getting to the concert.

We have probably all been in such situations where we will do almost anything to either do what we need to do or get where we want to be. These two men saw that the treasure was worth anything and so they did everything they could to gain that treasure.

Jesus was wanting the listeners to realise that the Kingdom of heaven is treasure and that we should not let anything stop us receiving and entering the kingdom of heaven. If the merchant had said I want that pearl but I really don't want to give up my donkey then the pearl would have stayed out of his grasp.

If you are not a follower of Jesus then let me ask you what is it that is stopping you? I know people have questions and if so do keep asking them but do keep listening and looking for the answers because I know that sometimes questions become a kind of firewall keeping us away from Jesus. People say well no one can answer all the questions I have so I can't become a follower of Jesus. For others it is pride that stops them following. The pride which will not accept that we cannot run our lives on our own and we need God, for others it may be money, family, or some sin which stops us from coming to Jesus. Jesus here is encouraging us to give up everything for the sake of knowing we are part of his Kingdom. He put it in slightly different words elsewhere, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36)

Friends if you are not yet a follower of Jesus I want to try and help you see from Jesus' words that there is nothing more important, nothing of greater value than being his follower, being in a relationship with him. I want to encourage you to give up whatever it is that is stopping you following him.

c. buy

Now these parables might seem to suggest that there is something we do to come into the Kingdom of God. We might ask what does it mean that they bought the treasure or pearl? However we must not take each aspect of the parable literally. As I said earlier the main point of the parables is that there is nothing more valuable than to be in a relationship with Jesus Christ and therefore we must get rid of anything that stops us having that relationship. However we cannot buy our way into the Kingdom. Yes we are encouraged to get rid of anything that stops us coming into the Kingdom but entrance is something we receive, "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." (Mark 10:15)

Friend if you are here today and have not yet committed yourself to following Jesus then the offer is there for you to receive entrance through Jesus into God's kingdom and I would encourage you to lay aside anything that stops you doing that because there is nothing more important, nothing of greater value than being his follower, being in a relationship with him.

2. For those who are in the Kingdom of Heaven

Of course many here are followers of Jesus. We know that we have come into the Kingdom through God's grace as we have accepted and trusted in what Jesus did for us on the cross. We have seen the great value of being his follower and as in v44 in joy have received salvation.

If that is so then you possess great treasure. So let me ask you do you see your faith as having great value? Is it something that you could not do without? Or are you in a sense playing at being a follower of Jesus, doing it when it fits you, when it is convenient? Is your faith a 24/7 faith or a Sunday morning faith?

Jesus was saying that there is nothing more important, nothing of greater value than being his follower, being in a relationship with him. So for those of us who have come to faith, have become followers of Jesus then if there is something which is stopping us living that out we must get rid of it. As Jesus said we can't serve two masters. Either he is the most important thing in our lives or he is not we can't have it both ways and if we claim to be his followers and he is not first in our lives then whatever is has to be dealt with.

But there is a second and for today more important thing and that is if we have recognised the great value of faith so that we say "I don't know what I would do if I didn't have my faith" then are you going to deprive others of having faith like yours? Many people who win the lottery seem to be only too eager to share some of their good fortune with family and friends. If we have come to faith and been blessed by that then are we not going to share our joy and the blessings of faith with our family and friends?

I remember some time back hearing the story of a minister who was going down the road when he came on a lorry which had overturned and spilt its load of bags of sugar. The police had arrived on the scene and rung the company who told them to give the sugar away. So everyone who came down the road received 2 bags of sugar. The minister accepted his and was on his way home when he saw a little old man going up and down the street telling everyone that there was free sugar available and where to get it. The Minister felt very selfish.

We have something much more valuable than a couple of bags of sugar should we not be sharing our faith? Why share faith because it is so valuable!

How are we going to do that you and I?

a. Give

Well can I suggest as a starting point that we might give our friend a metal detector? I mean Terry Herbert found treasure when he went searching with a metal detector. Can we not put things in our friends hands that will help them in a search for Jesus, a gospel, a book, a DVD, a website address anything that might help them in that search for the truth of Jesus.

b. Pray

Then of course put them on your prayer list. Pray that God would stir their hearts to want to follow Jesus, pray that God would lead them to places where they can find the treasure of faith and pray that God would enable them to get rid of everything that might stop them following Jesus.

If as Peter said "your faith— of greater worth than gold" then don't simply hold it to yourself but be seeking the opportunities to share that faith with others.

In these parables Jesus makes us aware that there is nothing more important, nothing of greater value than being his follower, being in a relationship with him. If you are not yet a follower then don't rest content with that for here is something of infinite importance and value so seek sell and receive and if you have become a follower of Jesus also don't rest content with that but share the treasure with others as we point them in the right direction and pray for them.

Friends we have been looking over these weeks about sharing our faith as we move towards a mission in 2013. The question is often asked why should I share faith and we have seen various reasons:

Because people need saving

Because it changes people

Because God loves people

Because of God's patience

Because of Christ's call

Because it is of great value

I hope as we have listened to the various sermons they have challenged and encouraged us because sharing faith is something we are all called to do. It is part of our life as Christians. My prayer is that God would continue to challenge us in this and I hope your prayer will be that God will give you the opportunity to share your faith.