

“Hidden Treasure” // Matthew 13:44–46 // Listen #2

Intro¹: **MATTHEW 13:44** if you have your Bibles...

When I was a little kid—like 4 or 5 years old—one of my favorite TV shows was called **RESCUE 911 (PIC)**—anybody remember that show? With William Shatner, the Nicolas Cage of the 1970’s and 80’s.

It was a show about firemen and, as with many young boys, firemen became my heroes. It thought it was **so cool** that when the alarm went off they would slide down the pole and jump into these boots that had their fire pants attached, pull them up and within seconds they’d be in the truck and out the door.

Well, the **show made it seem like fires happened all the time**, so I wanted to be ready if one happened in our house.

- So, beside my bed I tucked my jeans into my boots so I could jump in like they did.
- (I even asked my parents to put a pole off our back deck so I could slide down it. They never did, which was probably wise.) **Maybe most importantly, I put all my favorite possessions on my bedside table** in order so I could grab the most valuable stuff and get out if I smelled smoke. I can still remember trying to think what should go in the coveted “bedside table” slot, and things changed from week to week, but one consistent item was a set of 3 or 4 of my favorite records.

- (BTW, does anyone remember RECORDS? This wasn’t when having a record collection was a cool hipster thing to do. It was when it was what we listened to.
- **Yes, I’m that old.** I know, some of you think I’m in my mid-20’s; but, it’s true—I am indeed in my early 30’s.
- **My most favoritest of all my records** was my read-along Davy Crockett book. (My mom had told me as a boy that our family was related to him—that he was my great, great, great, great Uncle, which I thought was pretty amazing—so, btw, if you’re listening to our podcast from Texas, you’re welcome.)
- **I kept that record right there with my favorite stuff**, so that if the house burned down, I could get out with those and at least preserve the family lineage.

Over the years, what I would keep there on my bedside table, metaphorically speaking, has changed—but it’s a good mental exercise to go through, to think what you’d want to hold onto if you lost everything else.

- (And, for the record, my Davy Crockett records are still on that list for me. They now sit proudly next to my complete box set of all 89 of Nicolas Cage’s masterful films.) **(You can hate on him all you want, but who else his age has 89 films with only 3 sequels?)**

The value you place on something is shown by what you’ll give up for it.

When Jesus talked about finding the Kingdom, he used terms like these. He taught that finding the Kingdom was like finding something of such incredible value that you’d gladly leave everything else behind to get it.

¹ Grateful for help from James Montgomery Boice, “People of the Kingdom,” in *The Parables of Jesus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), pp. 29–36; Joshua Harris, “The Hidden Treasure and The Pearl” from the series *Parables*, preached at Covenant Life

Church on December 8, 2013; Tim Keller, “The Parable of the Pearl,” Matthew 13:44–46, preached at Redeemer Presbyterian, NYC, “Buying the Field,” Matt Chandler.

He taught that through the 2 shortest parables in the Bible, Matthew 13:44–46. Here they are. (BTW, this might be the shortest passage I've ever preached from—but don't worry, you'll still get the FULL length sermon!) “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field, that a man found and reburied. Then in his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one priceless [or “very precious”] pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it.” **Matthew 13:44–46**

Two very similar stories making one distinct point: In the first story, a man stumbles onto a treasure randomly.

- **We don't know exactly what he's doing** in this field—maybe he's been hired to plow it, or maybe he's taking a shortcut home, or burying a dead body, or whatever—we don't know, but while he is there he uncovers a priceless treasure.
- BTW, **who hasn't dreamed of having something** like this happen to you? I used to think **guys with metal detectors** were a little nerdy (and I still think that), but recently I read about Terry Herbert, a guy in Great Britain who, using his metal detector, discovered more than \$5 million worth of gold and silver objects dating back to the 7th century in his neighbor's backyard!² So, who's laughing now?
 - **And noe, after watching *National Treasure***, I am constantly tapping on loose bricks in old churches or trying to find coded messages in stained glass windows. Currently I'm **not allowed** in Duke Chapel for just that reason.
- **In Jesus's day, finding treasure like this was not all that uncommon.** You see, **back then people didn't have banks**. So, if you had a huge pile of money you wanted to keep safe, you would bury it. And if your town was being attacked, as happened quite often in Israel, you would bury it quickly so the attacking army

wouldn't confiscate it. But then, a lot of times the person would die in the attack and no one would know where it was!

- In **1 of the archaeological digs at Qumran**, for example, they found a map with 64 places that people in that community had buried treasure to hide it from invading armies.
- **So, the point is, many people in Jesus's day lived with the excitement of finding old, buried treasure**—so when he tells this story they all kind of lean in.
- **Now, I will say that in this story there does seem to me to be a small ethical dilemma:** *Is the guy who found the treasure morally obligated to tell the person who owns the field?* Great question.
- Jesus skips over it. In fact, the guy in Jesus's story acts a little shady— it says **“he reburied”** the treasure and doesn't tell anyone about it. (IT's like finding a box with all the **Infinity Stones** in it)
 - He straightaway makes his way to the owner's house and said, “How much for that worthless piece of dirt out there?”
- And the guy said, **“Why do you want that piece of land?”** And the man makes something up, “I want to build a mini-golf,” or “I just purchased a flock of yaks and need somewhere for them to graze,” or, “I heard a voice that said, ‘If you build it they will come.’”
- They finally agree on a price, and evidently it is quite a lot because in order to purchase it the man has to sell everything else he has.

And then come the most important 3 words in the parable: **“in his joy.”**

- **Normally, if you had to walk away from everything** you owned you would be devastated, but this **man is elated with joy** because the treasure he is gaining is far more valuable than anything he is walking away from.

This, Jesus says, is like finding the Kingdom of God.

² <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/28/britains-fields-gold-top-10-treasure-finds-amateurs-uk/2009-amateur-treasure-hunter-terry-herbert-prowling-english/>

The **second parable makes the same point**, with a few small distinctions:

- This time, the **one who discovers the treasure**—a “pearl of great price”—is not a blue-collar worker, but a very wealthy merchant.
- And unlike the first guy, this guy doesn't discover the treasure accidentally, this guy has made a **lifetime of hunting treasure**.
- **Pearls, btw, were the most valuable jewel** in the ancient world, mainly because they were so hard to get (they didn't have all the diving gear and stuff we have today, so they were hard to come by).
- **Only the wealthiest of the wealthy had them:** It was said that the majority of Cleopatra's worth was contained in just 2 pearls, valued in today's terms at over \$4 billion.³
- This **man has made a living of buy and selling pearls**, but this one is of such exquisite beauty that he **sells all** his other ones, and his businesses and houses and land, to buy it.

Two men:

- one blue-collar, one white-collar;
- one with relatively little, the other with quite a lot;
- one who wasn't looking for treasure, the other obsessed with it.
- One poor and common, the other rich and educated—
- but **both of them encounter something** of such value that it makes everything else in their lives look worthless by comparison.

This, Jesus said, is like discovering the Kingdom of God. And these 2 small parables teach us 3 massive things:

(I use 'Kingdom of God' and 'Gospel' interchangeably here)

1. The gospel is hidden

This is a **common theme in Matthew**—a theme we saw last week—reinforced again right here in these 2 parables. The gospel is hidden, and most people miss it.

The Bible presents this in a number of ways:

A. The glory of Jesus was hidden an earthly body

- **Isaiah 53** that there was no comeliness in the Messiah that we should desire him.
- IOW, he **wasn't physically impressive**.
- **He didn't look like you'd think the divine Son of God** would look.
- The Son of God who designed the oceans, the stars, the nucleus of the atom and the human brain was born into the world through the messy process of childbirth and grew up among the poorest of the poor.
 - He dressed in ordinary clothes, ate ordinary food, and his feet and back got sore after standing all day just like the rest of us. He never led an army, won an election or got an award.
- **And for that reason, many people missed him.**
- **But that was intentional.** God doesn't want people who only want to use him to gain power. He wants people who love him, who love what he loves—and wouldn't just try to use him to get power and beauty for themselves.
- **You see, had he come in power and physical beauty** he would have attracted people who only wanted to use him to get those things for themselves.
- **So, he hid his power in an earthly disguise** so that only those pure of heart would perceive him.
 - **I love that scene at the end of Indiana Jones' Last Crusade**, where they are trying to pick out which cup was the actual Grail. And the 1st guy, who was on a treasure hunt, he and his partner choose this royal-looking, golden cup studded with diamonds: “This is the cup of the King of Kings,” he says. But when he tries to drink from it, instead of giving him life it

³ Keller.

makes him age 100 years in an instant, and **he crumbles into dust** and blows away. And the guardian knight says, **PIC 'He chose poorly.'**

- **Then, Indiana Jones, ever the erudite theologian**, who wasn't seeking treasure but trying to save his dad who was **a dying of a gunshot wound**, picks out the very plain looking cup and says, "This is the cup of a carpenter." And when he drinks from it, it gives life. **And the old knight says, (PIC)** "You have chosen... 'wisely.'"

I wouldn't normally say that Indiana Jones movies are great places to learn theology, but **that's not bad**. God hides his power and glory in a plain-looking package.

In the same way...

B. The power of the gospel is hidden in its simplicity

- The **gospel message is not impressive on the surface**. It comes to us in the form of a preached word that we can set aside, argue with, even ignore. **But in these words are the power of new life.**⁴
- **This is what we saw last week:** Jesus said that his word is like an acorn—so small you can crush it under your feet, even though it has within it the potential for a mighty tree whose roots can split concrete.
- **In the same way, Jesus said, this word, which is put in the mouths of ordinary people**, contained in simple stories and parables, and easy enough for a child to understand, contains within it the ability to free the believing soul from the penalty and power of sin and infuse divine life into the hearer.
 - Which—if I could **digress for just** a minute—is why I take preaching so seriously.
 - **We don't have "speakers"** at this church, we have *preachers*.

- (Speakers are these things that hang up here that you hear sound through.)
- **We don't "give talks;"** we proclaim God's words.
 - Talks might entertain or enlighten you, but this word can save your soul.
- **Paul compared** the act of preaching to when he would say to a lame person, "be healed." In those syllables are the power to make the lame walk—if the hearer receives them by faith.
 - **I know that when I'm standing up here delivering to you the promises of God, if you believe them**, it will do more than give you a new perspective, it will impart to you the very power of God.
- Which is **why I take preparation for the message so seriously**. I spend the greater part of my week studying for the weekend.
- I want to **know what God says** so I can give it to you.
- I can tell you that not once in the 16 years I have served as your pastor have I ever felt unprepared up here standing before you.
- Underqualified, yes. Unworthy, yes. Underprepared, no.
 - And I **don't say that so you'll congratulate me**; I say that so you'll know how seriously I take this.
- **And when I stand up here I try hard not to spend most** of my time sharing with you my opinions about life and culture. This is not 'good advice time' from Uncle J.D.
 - I'm not a life-coach.
 - I'm a preacher of God's words.
 - I don't dispense good advice; I proclaim good news.
- **Paul says that what I do is simple on the surface**—it doesn't take a lot of skill. (I just read God's words to you and tell you what they mean—but with them come the power of God.)
- **And so, I study all week** and then **backstage** I do *3 things* before I walk out here: *Pray, check my mic, and check my zipper*. Because I

⁴ **Even the form it is delivered in is mundane**. Parables about birds and seeds are not the vehicle you'd expect to contain divine truth. **But don't let the form fool you**—in these words are the very power of God.

don't want you to get distracted. *That's like a **metaphor for my whole job: prepare hard and try not to embarrass the gospel***

The power of the gospel is hidden in its simplicity. It's so simple, Jesus said, that a child can understand it, and **so profound**, Peter says, that angels long to look into it.

- Is there anything else simultaneously simple enough for a child to understand and profound enough to baffle an angel?
 - **So simple a child can explain it, but so profound** angels still are amazed by it. **Think about what angels have seen.** They had a front row seat at creation; they've witnessed God splitting the Red Sea and making a donkey talk. But what blows their mind is the gospel, and that's what they spend all their time talking about.
- **So, don't tell me you are bored with it.**
 - It's why we say that to grow in Christ not by going beyond the gospel, but deeper into it.
 - **Gospel truth is like a well:** you get the best water not by widening the well—but by going deeper into it.

C. The beauty of the gospel is hidden in ordinary believers

- The **instruments of gospel proclamation** are ordinary people.
- Honestly, I sometimes find myself wishing sometimes that God saved more impressive people—more athletes, more movie stars, more brilliant intellects. But it's just not God's way.
- Think about Paul's famous statement: "...not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in his presence." **(1 Cor 1:26–30, NIV)**
 - —ROGERS?

- But don't be fooled by the plainness of the package. **C. S. Lewis, in his *Screwtape Letters***, which are letters from a senior demon to a junior demon telling him how to keep his subject from God: The guy starts getting interested in God and going to church. **The senior demon tells the junior demon:** *Play up the disappointment he feels at church. Make him notice the voices out of tune around him. The odd clothes people are wearing. The cheap Christian jewelry. How so many of them are overweight or unattractive. "He will believe (that because some of these people look ridiculous) that the religion of these people must be ridiculous also."*
- That's happening to some of you this weekend. You can't get over the weird haircut of the guy 3 rows up, or the country accent of the lady behind you, or the **problems in the lives** of some of the Christians you know—or maybe you are **thinking about me**, "He doesn't sound that smart."
 - **And you are saying**, "This message can't be true, because these people are just not that impressive."
- But this is just **how God does things**.
- He doesn't want you to be attracted to our beauty, but his. **So, he puts his glory in broken instruments** to see if you're more interested in divine truth or physical impressiveness.

So, **that is the first thing we see from this parable is that the gospel is hidden; hidden so that most people**—who are in search of only superficial beauty—miss it.

2. The gospel woos us with a greater joy

I told you that "in his joy" may be the most important words in these **2 parables**.

And that normally if you told a man he'd be losing everything he owned he'd be devastated. Yet **this man is filled with joy** because the value of what he is gaining far outweighs the sorrow over anything he is losing.

Let me ask you to consider: Is this the metaphor you'd use to describe your encounter with the kingdom of God—that it was like finding a treasure that brought you so much joy that you gladly left everything else to possess it?

Many of you, if you were **honest**, might choose a different image.⁵

- Maybe, “Discovering the Kingdom of God is like encountering a never-ending to-do list of things to constantly feel guilty about.”
- Or, “Discovering the Kingdom of God is like **being tied to a ball-and-chain** that weighs you down and keeps you from having fun that you have to wear so you won't go to hell.”

And that **shows us just how little we understand** about who Jesus is and what he is offering to us.

This parable confronts a deeply-ingrained myth in our culture, and that is the God is upset at us because we want to be happy.

Write this down: **God is not upset at you because you want to be happy.**

- **Many people think that. I used to think that.** I thought sin and the world were fun, and God wanted me to walk away from all fun and GET RELIGIOUS.
 - **I always felt like at youth camp the message was,** “The problem with you people is that you want to be happy. We're going to give an altar call and I want you to come up here and surrender any desire you have to be happy.”
 - And I'd think, “**OK, I guess it is better to be miserable** in life than to spend eternity in hell.”
- **But think of it like this:** Say that on my wedding day my wife stood at the altar and the minister says, “Veronica, would you say your vows to J.D.?” And she says, “I hereby renounce all my

desires for romance, physical intimacy and happiness to become the wife of J.D.” I'd say, “Whoa! I don't want you to forsake those things for me, I want you to find them *in me*.”

- **It doesn't glorify God when we serve him out of duty.** So, here's how you should think about it: **God is not upset at you because you want to be happy; he's upset for you because you choose to be happy in things besides him.**
 - **This is what we mean when we say he is a jealous God:** He's not jealous because he is insecure; he knows **he is the only one** who can make us happy, so he's jealous for our sakes.

LISTEN: it doesn't glorify God when we serve him only out of drudgery and duty. To continue on with the marriage analogy: Would my wife be “glorified” in your eyes if you found out that right before we got married, I had said to someone, “Look, there are a lot of girls I think are more beautiful than Veronica. I think I'd be much happier with one of these other girls if I could marry them. But I just feel like loving Veronica is the right thing to do. I owe it to her parents.” **No, that's not glorifying to her at all.** She's glorified when I say, “Once I met Veronica, I lost my interest in other girls.”

- **And that's the way it was. On our wedding day I wasn't looking out at other pretty girls** and thinking, “I wonder if I'd have had a shot with her?”
- **No, I was so consumed in the joy** of what I was getting that I'd lost all interest in what I was giving up.

This is how Jesus wants you to feel about him.

And it is that joy, and that joy alone, that can sustain the Christian life. **Nehemiah said, “The joy of the Lord is our strength.”** Joy, not the strength of your will, is your joy.

- **The joy of the Lord is our strength to obey.**

⁵ The below is from Joshua Harris, “The Hidden Treasure and The Pearl”

- The strength of your will is never enough to keep you faithful. You have to be consumed by a greater joy.
- **Soccer story:** When I was a senior in college I got a job as a soccer coach for a 12–13 year old boys' soccer team.
- **The joy of the Lord is your *contentment in the mundane*.**
 - **Knowing Jesus this way can give you joy** even in boring jobs or in the drudgery of being a student or a mom changing diapers.
 - Say you have two **people who get a job licking envelopes**—one making minimum wage. The other getting \$5000 per envelope. The worst day, the best day! *Joy of Jesus; heavenly reward*
- **The joy of the Lord is our hope *in trials*.**
 - I've described it this way (one of my personal fav illus) **If you find out you have an inheritance...**

Those who make it as Christians are those who have Jesus as their joy.

- **That's why when John Piper meets someone** new and starts discussion matters of faith, he says that more important to him than the question, "Have you accepted Christ" is "Has Jesus become your treasure?"
- So, that's my question for you—not, "**Have you accepted Christ?**" but "Have you discovered him as your treasure?"

The gospel woos us with greater joy. I think so many of you are missing this and why you are so miserable. You have no idea the potential joy of the Christian life.

Here's one of my memory verses recently: **Psalm 4:7, "You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound."**

A better joy than what you get from food or friends or riches. You ever had the experience of encountering a new joy that makes

everything before it seem like nothing? You fall in love, or have a kid, or get established in your career—and you think, 'Wow, I never knew I was missing!' **But if you went back to explain this to your former self, he wouldn't get it.**

If I could use a time-turner and go back to 5-year-old J.D. and tell him that one day he would meet someone named Veronica, and that she was more wonderful than his Davy Crockett records, and they'd have kids, and so would they..." And you said to 5-year-old J.D., "This is your future, look forward to it!" 5-year-old J.D. might say, "Will I be able to eat candy in the future?" (because that was happiness to 5-year old J.D.) Present day J.D., 32-year-old J.D. would say, "You're going to experience things that make candy seem like nothing."

That's us! God offers us *real* happiness, and we essentially say, 'But will there be candy?'

3. The gospel requires leaving it all

Notice that both men in these parables had to leave literally everything else to possess the treasure. That is the requirement. No conditions. No refusals.

But many of us want to have the treasure in the field without having to let go of anything. **We think we can have Jesus** and not "sell everything," so to speak. So rather than surrender to Jesus, we do the next best thing, we think: We get religious.

Religion is a way for us to pay God off. I've heard it described like keeping ~~God in time out~~. You don't really want God to be in control or a part of your life, but you also don't want him against you, so you do what you have to do to keep him contained. So, it's like you put God in time out.

- ~~When you need help... “God, get out of time out.” But then he tells you something you don’t like, and you say, ‘Oh no, back in time out.’~~
- ~~But then you sin, and you think he’s coming for you, “What do I have to do to get him back in time out?” Pray. Cross yourself. Say some ‘Hail, Mary!’s’ Give money.~~

Religion is where you do the minimum requirement to pay God off and keep him from being against you. **That’s not repentance. That’s not joy.**

God is not interested in people who get involved in Christianity to keep him off of their back. He is interested in those who see in him a treasure of greater value than anything else on earth and gladly leave everything else to possess him.

It’s why the 2nd **question we ask those in baptism**, “Are you willing to go...”?

Sometimes people say, “I’m not really sure what you’re asking. Are you saying I literally have to give up all my money?”

- I had a really honest talk with a guy this week who accepted Christ in my office. He said, “I don’t know what it means to walk away from it all and I’m afraid that there might be things Jesus shows me I can’t obey in.”
- **I described the process of conversion like this:** Say you stole a car... I want you to keep driving it, but I’ll tell you what to do.” Where do I need to turn? I’ll tell you when you get there. And he’ll give you the strength when it comes.
 - You just have to be willing to take the first step, which in his case was baptism...

Coming to Jesus means that you may not be sure where Jesus is leading you, or how you’ll have the strength to obey, but you recognize that Jesus is the one treasure you’d never want to be without.

Let me close with a great story that summarizes everything we’ve learned: In Cairo there is a small, dusty grave in an out of way location you’d never realize was there if you weren’t looking for it. A small tombstone marking the spot identifies it as the final resting place of William Borden, the heir of the Borden milk company. Borden is still a big company even now, but back in the 1920’s it was one of America’s largest companies, and Borden was the heir apparent. Borden had graduated from Yale in 1909 and the full reins of power were offered to him.

But he had become a Christian in college and had been so overwhelmed by the gospel that supposedly he had written in the flyleaf of his Bible **“no rivals.”**

After graduated from college he believed that God was calling him to carry the gospel to Muslims, and his parents told him he was crazy. In the flyleaf of his Bible he wrote the words **“no refusals.”**

So, he went to Egypt, but after only four months of zealous ministry, he contracted spinal meningitis and died at the age of twenty-five, on a ship in route for medical help. Someone asked him on board the ship, right before he died what he thought about his decisions, and he said simply, **“No regrets.”** “On his tombstone in Cairo is a brief description of his sacrifices for the kingdom of God and for Muslim people, followed by the simple phrase, “Apart from faith in Christ, there is no explanation for such a life.”⁶

⁶ Adapted from Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle*

But when you understand the value of who Christ is, that kind of life makes sense. He is the treasure in the field worth leaving everything for if that's what it takes to follow him.

- That is what it means to become a Christian. No rivals, no refusals... and I promise you one day you'll say "no regrets."

Have you received Jesus this way? **NO RIVALS; NO REFUSALS, NO REGRETS.** If you say no rivals and refusals, I promise you'll get to a place where you say 'no regrets.'

BOW YOUR HEADS: LET ME GIVE YOU A FEW, OPEN HANDS IF YOU CAN... say "NO RIVALS, NO REFUSALS' HERE"

- Receive Christ.
- Baptism.
- Full dedication of your life to Christ and your future
- Go on church plant or mission trip
- Start giving God your 1st and best in finances
- Purity—stop living together.
- Make small group a priority, go on mission

