

“Stories of God and Life: Treasure!”

I’m going to ask you to do something. Take a sheet of paper and make a list of the things you treasure most in your life. What are the things you would least want to lose or give up? (After you’ve done that, hold onto the list – we’ll come back to it later).

(Show metal detector). This is my metal detector. Some years ago I said, “One of the things I want to do before I die is get a metal detector and go treasure hunting.” So our kids got me this metal detector one Christmas. I don’t know if any of you are into bounty hunting. There are groups formed around this interest. One evening a friend and I went to the local metal detector club meeting.

There is something in the human spirit that makes us yearn for hidden treasure! I remember in history class studying about the California gold rush of 1849, and the mad rush for gold. A diver off the Florida coast located a sunken 17th-century Spanish vessel filled with silver and gold. That would be quite a find, wouldn’t it! Sometimes people stumble across a treasure without even seeking it. A shepherd boy near the Dead Sea wandered into a cave and found scrolls that were 2000 years old. A farmer plowing his field in Suffolk, England struck a container that held beautiful silver dishes dating back to the Roman times.

Several of Jesus’ parables are about people who discover treasures. One is found in Matthew 13, verse 44. “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” There were no banks then, as we know them today. One of the safest places to store treasured possessions was in the ground. Palestine was a volatile area, often plagued by wars. So, if a person’s property stood in the line of fire, a person might quickly bury their valuables and flee, in hopes of coming back and claiming them. Some people, for whatever reason, never returned.

Jesus tells a little story about a man who’s walking in someone else’s field, or perhaps plowing, and stumbles over buried treasure. He is so happy and excited that he sells everything he has to get enough money to buy the field. We may think this person who discovered the treasure was a cheat because it wasn’t his property. But Jewish law said if somebody discovered scattered money, it belongs to the finder.

Now imagine hearing Jesus telling this story. What point would people remember? *Someone found something so valuable that it was worth giving up everything else in order to gain this treasure.*

Jesus told another parable which is very similar. It is found in the next two verses: “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:45-46). Whereas in the first story a person *stumbled* onto a treasure, here a merchant *intentionally* sets out to find fine pearls. Pearls were valued not only for their monetary value, but for their loveliness and beauty.

Some years ago Nancy and I went gem mining in northwestern North Carolina. I had seen this program on TV about the gem mines. Then it was on again. So I suggested to Nancy that we head there on vacation. I have to admit, as we were driving south I kept thinking, “Am I crazy or

what? This might be nothing like it was cracked up to be on the TV program. I'm going to be in the dog house if I've ruined our vacation time." But we had a great experience. Nancy had amethyst ear rings made from the stones we found. I had a ruby ring made. We came back with a large sapphire stone. Several years ago we went gem mining in a different area, and Nancy found a gemstone that she had made into a beautiful ring.

Well, in this parable, one lucky pearl dealer comes across a pearl so rare and exquisite that he rushes to sell everything he has to get that "pearl of great price".

These are two short stories, parables, that have the same point: *Someone found something so priceless and desirable that he gave up everything in order to get it.*

Remember, these are parables about the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. Jesus introduces both of these stories: "The kingdom of heaven is like..." (Matthew 13:44,45). Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God is such a treasure that it is worth giving up everything to gain it!

Do you remember what the kingdom of God is? It is God's "rule" or "reign", the realm where God rules and His will is done. When I seek God's kingdom, I want God's will to be done in me and in the world. When Jesus came on earth, He gave new meaning to the kingdom of God. He said God's kingdom was breaking into the world with His coming. So, to be part of the kingdom we need to accept Jesus, and believe in Him, and follow Him.

To be a follower of Jesus and do His will and be part of the kingdom is a *treasure* so priceless that it's worth giving up everything to have it! Jesus once said these startling words: "So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions" (Luke 14:33). Wow!

But there were people mentioned in the New Testament who actually did that! Simon Peter, one of the 12 disciples, once said to Jesus: "We have left everything to follow you" (Mark 10:28). Jesus answers back: "Truly I tell you...no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – with persecutions – and in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30).

Why is being part of the kingdom of God, following Jesus, such a treasure? Think about it: Having our sins forgiven, having a relationship with our Creator, having Christ live in us to guide and strengthen us each day, having the promise of everlasting life with God...that's awesome!

This is a treasure that lasts! Jesus once said this: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not

So many things that we treasure so much in this life don't last nor satisfy. Like Jesus says, these earthly treasures can rust, or get moth-eaten, or be stolen by thieves! The shiny new car can lose its luster even before it's paid off! For some, making a lot of money and accumulating a lot of "stuff" becomes our treasure hunt. The "kingdom of thingdom." But even if we are fortunate enough to succeed, often it doesn't satisfy us and only creates a desire for more. Some people dream of winning the multi-million dollar lottery. That would be the treasure of all treasures! But follow up studies done on lottery winners have shown that a number of winners say they are no happier *after* winning the lottery than they were before (or that they are even less content). Elvis Presley gained fame and fortune to a degree few ever have. He had millions of women swooning over him, the world bowing in adulation at his feet. But you are no doubt aware of his battle with drug addiction and the chaos in his life. When Elvis' body was found the morning after his death, his half-brother testified that he was lying prone on the floor, a Bible and a book on the Shroud of Turin open beneath him.

Think of those who make a treasure out of another person, only to be disappointed. We're infatuated with this guy, or this woman. We see that person as a treasure, quite a "catch". Some may even compromise their moral values, or deny their Christian commitment, just to land this person. They do. But then find out this person has feet of clay.

More than one person has gone to great ends to gain something they thought was a lasting treasure, only to discover that it didn't do for them what they thought it would do!

Turn again to the sheet where you listed things you treasure. What did you put? Anyone put "Being part of the kingdom of God?" Anyone put: "Jesus", or "having a relationship with God", or "doing God's will?" I'm not saying the other things we may have put down are bad or wrong (that we treasure spouse, friends, freedom, family, our nice home, etc.) – *but are they treasures that will last?*

"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" (Matthew 13:44). By the way, did you notice, Jesus said "in his joy" he went and sold everything he had to get that treasure! To be part of God's kingdom brings a joy and excitement all its own!

I'm thinking of two different groups of people who call themselves Christians. *People in the one group call themselves Christians, but do it with little heart or passion.* Yes, there is *belief* in Christ – these people verbally acknowledge Him as Savior and Lord. They are willing to come to church, and maybe even enjoy worship services and help with church activities. But God and religion are just *one compartment* of their life – on the same plane as their job, their social life, family activities and pleasurable pursuits. They are nominal Christians. These people sort of flirt with the kingdom, dabble around at following Jesus, but don't view the Christian faith and Christian discipleship as a treasure worth seeking above all else.

But there is another group calling themselves Christians that pursue the kingdom and follow Jesus with reckless abandon! These are Christians whose whole life is centered on Christ. They think of Him when they get up in the morning and wonder how they can serve Him that day. They seek Him throughout day. It's not that their families aren't important, or that they can't enjoy hobbies and recreational activities. But everything in their life seems to revolve around Christ. Learning about Him. Being in touch with Him. Making Him part of everything they do, because Jesus is a Treasure that out sparkles anything this world can offer.

The Apostle Paul was one of those sold-out Christians who gave up all to follow Christ. Listen to what he says: "All the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant – dog dung. I've dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by Him" (Philippians 3:8 *The Message*). *Now which of these 2 groups best describes you and me?*

Knowing Christ, making Him our Master, being part of God's kingdom, is a treasure worth giving up everything to get!

There used to be this TV commercial for metal detectors. It shows a guy with a metal detector, raving about how in using it he gets exercise, he makes wife happy, and especially *this* (he holds out a diamond ring he had found). Well, I've had my metal detector for a number of years now. Ask me how much I've used it, and how much treasure I've found. So far, I have found..... 35 cents! Actually, there are two problems I didn't anticipate when I got the metal detector. One is, it's hard to find the time to go out with it. But there is a bigger issue: finding places to use it. Most people don't welcome you digging holes on their property! And I'm a bit too timid to go up to people and ask their permission to do that! So, I'll probably take this back home, and put it back in the garage where it was before. It will sit there. And I'll never find the treasure I'd like to have.

But listen – I *believe* there are all kinds of treasures underground. In this neighborhood. Near our home in Stevens. All over Lancaster County. The problem is: I'll never find it if I don't use my detector and seek the treasures!

The kingdom of God, doing God's will, passionately following Jesus is a treasure greater than any other treasure in creation – but I'll never find it if my spiritual metal detector is packed away in the garage!

Back in 1905, there was a baseball game at Salt Lake City, Utah. The Rhyolites were playing the Beattys and the Beattys were up to bat. The pitcher threw the ball, the batter swung - and the ball rocketed toward 1st base. The 1st baseman was a man named William Giffiths, and as he saw the ball coming his way, he was surprised to see it ricochet off a small stone and land in his glove. He beat the runner to first easily. The little stone had given Griffiths a lucky break, but he decided it had no business on the playing field, so he walked over and picked it up. He started to raise his hand to throw it off the field when something caught his eye. He took a careful look at

the stone and recognized free gold in it. Then he quietly slipped it into his pocket and went on with the game.

That evening, he returned to the ball park with a lantern and spent an hour scratching around in the soil until he had accumulated a bucketful of rocks. By morning he knew that those rocks represented an unbelievable treasure.

He got together with two friends and with them quietly bought the ball park. The mine was called First Base, and the first shaft entered paying ore at a depth of 33 feet. And infielder Griffiths soon found himself to be a very wealthy man.

There are some treasures worth giving up everything we have in order to have!

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