

Pentecost 8 / July 26, 2020

Matthew 13:44-52

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

How many of you read “Treasure Island” by Robert Louis Stevenson, when you were children? Nothing seems to capture our imagination like the search for buried treasure. People have been looking for treasure on Oak Island in a weekly television series for years now. Every once in a while they find an object that gives them hope and prolongs the series.

Have you ever found something of great value? I met a woman, who as a child, found a metal box buried in the ground. When it was opened she saw that it was filled with gold coins. It was worth a fortune, or at least enough to get her started in life when she came of age. But you know what, the treasure she found was a treasure someone else lost! Someone buried it and for some reason, never came back for it.

Have you ever lost something of great value? How did you feel when you realized your loss? How did you feel, if it was found and returned to you? If you found something of great value, would you keep it for yourself, or would you seek to find the owner so it could be returned?

There are all kinds of ethical questions associated with lost objects and buried treasure, especially when they are of great value. In terms of this parable, why didn't the person who found the treasure hidden in the field, look for the person who had put it there in the first place? He or she was the rightful owner. Perhaps it was stolen treasure, after the manner of pirate stories. In which case, why didn't the person who found it, contact the police to return it to the rightful owner?

Lastly, why didn't the person who found the treasure tell the owner of the field? Even if the owner of the field didn't want the treasure, the value of the field would have increased, because of the presence of the treasure. If you discovered oil or minerals on a property in the days before the government owned all the mineral rights, would it be right to buy the property without first making the seller aware?

Jesus' parable isn't meant to give ethical advice on land transactions or to tell us how to deal with lost objects we happen to find. The earthly aspects are meant to highlight the spiritual meaning, which is the value of the kingdom of heaven, which surpasses the worth of all earthly treasures. The kingdom of heaven is so valuable that if a person gave up all she or he had for it, they would still come out ahead. The treasure of the kingdom of heaven is both its impact on daily life and its enduring value in eternity.

Worldly wealth buys a lot of comforts and luxuries that most people dream about. But, there are many things that worldly wealth can't buy; health, happiness, or meaning in life, to name just three. The kingdom of heaven won't guarantee you good health or spare you from grief and death. But it will empower you to bear your burdens, it will give you the comfort of God's Spirit within and around you, it will fill your life with purpose and meaning and it will bring you from the darkness of death, into the light of eternal life in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of heaven is to know God as Father through faith in Jesus His Son. The kingdom of heaven is a treasure worth more than all the wealth in the world. The kingdom of heaven is treasure given fully and freely, to all who receive Jesus in their hearts as Saviour and treasure Him as Lord.

Jesus also spoke about treasure in the Sermon on the Mount. He said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.” The trouble with treasure is that other people always want to get it for themselves. The earthly aspect to Jesus' parable of the hidden treasure is that many people would not report finding something another person had lost and would instead keep it for themselves. The earthly aspect of Jesus' parable is that many people would not disclose the discovery of something valuable in the ground, before purchasing the property for themselves. Even as people break in and steal, people misrepresent the value of property and keep things they find, without looking for the owner. Earthly treasure brings many worries and is the cause of many evils.

The treasure of the kingdom of heaven is God at the heart of our lives providing for all our needs of body and spirit, in time and for eternity. The kingdom of heaven is God's righteous reign, which begins in the human heart through faith in Jesus' Name and baptism into His dying and rising. The kingdom of heaven in the human heart is the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, making our bodies temples of His holiness. The treasure of the kingdom of heaven is knowing that nothing will be able separate us from the love God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

The treasure of the kingdom of heaven is the forgiveness of sins, the knowledge that God does not treat us as our sins deserve, but instead deals with us as a compassionate parent; with love and kindness. The joy of the kingdom of heaven is the love of God expressed in His grace for the sake of Christ Jesus. The Psalmist sang of this treasure in Psalm 103 saying, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities...as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us." There is no greater treasure than the kingdom of heaven. It is the righteous reign of God beginning in our hearts through faith in Jesus, fulfilled in our share of His resurrection to everlasting life.

A few chapters following our text, a rich young ruler comes to Jesus. He has it all, but he wants one thing more. He wants to live forever! He doesn't want to die. He wants eternal life. Eternal life? He came to the right man. Jesus is in the eternal life business. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me will live even though he dies." He said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever." His disciples acknowledged the same thing; they told Him, "Lord...you have the words of eternal life."

You want eternal life? No problem! Jesus said, "Sell what you possess and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Treasure in heaven?! Well that stopped the young fellow dead in his tracks. Sell? Give? Follow? He wasn't about to part with his worldly wealth for 'treasure in heaven.' Unlike the man in Jesus' parable who sold all he had so he could buy the field with the treasure, this man wouldn't sell anything. He decided not to follow Jesus and walked away.

Jesus concluded His words about treasure in the Sermon on the Mount saying, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart will be also." Where is our treasure? What is our treasure? The things we value most are our treasure! What we value most could be something other than buried treasure, or expensive pearls. There were few men in the ancient near east as wealthy as father Abraham, but his wealth was not his treasure.

When his wife Sarah died, he asked to purchase a cave for burial in a field that belonged to another man. The other man knew he had Abraham at a disadvantage. He could ask whatever he wanted for the cave, because Abraham needed it now. Abraham didn't bat an eye when the owner requested an exorbitant price. Abraham just measured out the silver as if it were sand. He was wealthy, but his wealth wasn't his treasure. He valued his wife more than his silver and he was prepared to bury her with dignity, no matter what the cost. He treasured his wife, but was she his treasure?

Abraham and Sarah were promised a child and are well known since antiquity, because they waited decades before the promise was fulfilled. A hundred year old man and a ninety year old woman waited to have a baby! They both laughed, until they saw it was no joke. What a treasure that child was! It's hard to imagine Abraham loving any person, even Sarah, more than he loved Isaac. But when the Lord told him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, Abraham prepared to return his son to God.

Isaac was a treasure, but Abraham's treasure was his relationship with God. That's where his heart was and that's why he could dole out silver like it was sand to provide a burying place for his wife. God could make silver as easily as He made sand. That's why he could trust God, even when he couldn't understand how He could ask for Isaac to be returned. Just as God had given him life, so He could restore him to life, or preserve his life. Abraham's treasure was the Lord. Our treasure is what we value the most in our lives. No matter what we treasure, in this parable Jesus teaches that there is no treasure greater than the kingdom of heaven, which we receive when we know Him as Saviour.

Jesus gives treasure that lasts forever. He gives the treasure of a relationship with God, which supports us in time and endures to eternal life. Jesus is in the eternal life business. In the gospel of John, He said that eternal life is to know God as Father and Himself as His Son. In time, every earthly treasure is buried in death. The treasure that survives death, is knowing God as Father through faith in Jesus His Son. Those who know Jesus as the Christ have the treasure of spiritual rebirth in relationship to God in time and the promise of resurrection to eternal life in His heavenly kingdom at the end of time. It is the treasure of greatest value!

God bless us each one, to receive with thankfulness and to return with gratefulness, all the treasures He gives us in time. God bless us each one, to treasure above all else, the kingdom of heaven; our relationship with Him, received through faith in Jesus. In His Name. Amen