

The Kingdom of Heaven Is a Treasure

by John Piper

The kingdom of heaven is so valuable that losing everything on earth is a happy trade-off, and the goal is to spread the value of Christ to more and more people.

Duration: 39:41

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 13:44-48, Romans 14:17, Revelation 11:15

Topics: "Kingdom Of God", "Christian Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor John Piper focuses on the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value in Matthew 13:44-46. He emphasizes the immense worth and value of the kingdom of heaven, which is like a treasure hidden in a field. The parables teach us that the kingdom of God is so valuable that it is worth giving up everything else in order to obtain it. The joy of having the kingdom surpasses any earthly possession or desire. Pastor Piper encourages listeners to prioritize the kingdom of God above all else and to be willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of gaining Christ.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at www.DesiringGod.org The text for Pastor John's message is found in the Gospel of Matthew, the 13th chapter, and in verses 44-52. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up, and then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. And when it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers, but threw the bad away.

So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Have you understood all these things? They said to him, Yes. And he said to them, Therefore, every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasury that which is new and that which is old. Let's pray.

Father, your son spoke with words that are so shocking. It seems like he didn't have much of a light side to him. At least we don't see it very often.

Most of the time he's talking about things that are so heavy. He was so serious, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, one from whom men hide their faces. They will separate the fish and throw them away.

There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. There will be outer darkness. There will be fire and burning.

All the business of the kingdom is so serious, Father. Grant tonight, I pray, and on the Lord's Day morning, that there would be a sense of the weight of your glory, the seriousness of the kingdom, the joy of having the kingdom. For his joy, he went and sold all that he had.

So come and fold people into your kingdom. Make your saving rule manifest, I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

So our focus here is on verse 44 of Matthew 13. And there's a link to last week's verse, Romans 14, 17. Let's read this verse again.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up, and then in his joy, he goes and sells everything that he has and buys that field. And the link, as you can see, to last week's text is the kingdom. The kingdom of God.

Here's Romans 14, 17, if you don't remember. The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. And everything we said about the kingdom last time is relevant here.

Here's what we said. It's reign, not realm. It's saving reign, redeeming reign, sanctifying rule, not just all of the rule.

Third, we said it is a reign that is saving and is only partly present and partly future. Much we enjoy now of the reign of God in our lives. Much is not yet fully manifest.

We still get sick and die. Fourthly, we said the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ are the same. There's not a separate kingdom for Jesus and a separate kingdom for the Father.

The kingdom of God and of the Lamb are one. Those are the four things we saw last time. And now here we are focusing on verse 44.

We need one more qualification, clarification. The kingdom of heaven. Is that a different term than kingdom of God, kingdom of heaven, kingdom of God? The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure and it isn't.

So my fifth clarification is the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are the same kingdom. Because in the first century, just like today, Jewish people are very reluctant to take the name of the divine on their lips. They're often using circumlocution, the name of the blessed, heaven.

Heaven and blessed are often, both in the New Testament and today, standing in the place of the term God or Yahweh because the Jews did not want to take the name of the Lord in vain. And the safest way to do that was not to take it on your lips at all. And so kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God are virtually

the same reality.

There's no significant difference. Now, what's the main point of this one verse parable? What's the main point? And I think it's really clear. Let me tell you what I think it is.

Let me read it again with you. The kingdom of heaven is like a 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.

Here's my effort to restate the point. The point is the kingdom of God and all that we just said about it is so valuable. I'm getting that from the word treasure.

It is so valuable that losing everything on earth but getting the kingdom is a happy trade-off. I think that's the point. The kingdom of God, having it, is so valuable that losing everything else in life, including life, and getting it is a happy trade-off.

I think that's the point of the parable. It would be a joyful sacrifice. So let's read it slowly now.

Take it a piece at a time. See if this is so. The kingdom of heaven.

Let's pause there. Let that sink in. I'm taking it in its full biblical context of the reign of God and of Christ, triumphing over everything that stands between you and everlasting happiness with God in God.

The exertion of the reign of God through Christ on the cross and the resurrection by the Spirit, removing every obstacle between you and everlasting life and joy with Him. That's the kingdom. When the kingdom comes, when you have the rule of God in your life, that's what He's doing, and He will do it perfectly.

The rule of God to save us from destruction and bring us into the enjoyment of the Father forever. All right, let's keep going. Verse 44, the kingdom of heaven is now like treasure hidden in a field.

So the focus in this parable is clearly on the value of the kingdom, the worth of the kingdom. The worth of having God rule on your behalf is not hard to see as the most valuable thing in the universe. I mean, try to imagine anything more valuable than for the almighty, omnipotent, all-wise, all-loving creator to move in on you like a king of the universe and say, I now exercise all of my wisdom and all of my omnipotence on your behalf to bring as much good into your eternity as is possible for an omnipotent being to bring.

I don't think it's possible to conceive of anything more valuable than that. And so it's not surprising that it would be called a treasure, a treasure hidden in a field. There's more.

Let's keep going. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Now, watch out here. I don't think you should press these details. Parables aren't like, like, like, what's the field? I don't think we should press the details here.

I think there's one main point, and the point is not the kingdom can be bought. I think there is plenty of evidence to that effect. The point is, if it costs you everything to have the kingdom, it's a good deal.

That's the point. The kingdom of God is so valuable, losing everything on earth and getting it is a happy tradeoff. Here's the way the apostle Paul puts it.

You know where I'm going to go? Philippians 3, 7 and 8. See, if you don't think this is Paul's paraphrase of this parable, more or less. Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things, and I count them as rubbish in order that I might gain Christ. I don't think he said anything anywhere closer to Matthew 13, 44 than those two verses in Philippians 3, 7 and 8. So in the parable, the man sells everything he has so that he can have the kingdom. And in Philippians 3, 8, Paul suffers the loss of everything in order that he may gain Christ.

And I think those are virtually identical realities. And the point is not that the kingdom can be bought or bartered for or negotiated for. Now, why do I think that? Why am I so confident that's not the point of this parable? When a parable has a little bit of ambiguity in it, one of the ways to settle whether that's the point like, oh, you can buy the kingdom, or whether the point is simply if you lose everything and gain the kingdom, it's a happy tradeoff, which is what I'm opting for.

One of the ways you check yourself on that is by finding the other things that Jesus himself said about how you get the kingdom. And they contradict the buying idea. Big time.

I'll give you some examples. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Bankrupt people get the kingdom.

That's all. You go over to Luke, it says, woe to you rich, for you have your reward. But blessed, blessed are the bankrupt, who in their spirits know they've got nothing with which to buy the kingdom.

Well, here's another one. That's Matthew 5, 3. Here's Mark 10, 15. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.

That's just the opposite of being rich and wealthy and saying, I can manage this, I can trade this off, I can buy this, I can produce enough value that I have to be compensated with kingdom. Unless you receive it, receive it like a child. A little child takes a gift from his parent.

You won't enter it. Here's one more. This is Matthew 10, 8. Freely, you received.

Freely, give. Without payment, you received. Without payment, give.

So there are at least three verses that say you don't buy the kingdom. The kingdom is a gift, and you receive it like a poverty of spirit bankrupt person, or like a little child, or like one who gets a free gift. So the point here in verse 44 of Matthew 13 and Philippians 3, 8, is that you don't get the kingdom because you earn it or buy it, but because you want it more than anything.

He sold everything when he saw the king. He stubbed his toe on the chest in the field. He leaned down and scraped the dirt away.

He opened the chest and saw something that was worth more than the universe. And he went and he counted everything rubbish compared to that because he wanted it so bad. That's where the focus is.

How badly do you want the kingdom? The kingdom is freely given to those who want it. It's like a little child who goes into a toy store filled with toys. And some of them are really expensive and really fantastic.

And the owner of the store says to the little child, you can have the best and the most expensive toy in this story if you want it more than all the others. That's all. But if you want this crummy little one over here, then you can't have the best one.

That's the requirement. There is a condition for having the kingdom, but it isn't your money, it isn't your power, it isn't your status or your esteem, how much stuff you've got. It's how much you want it.

That's why new birth is necessary because most of the people don't want the kingdom. You've got to be changed. When you want the kingdom, then Luke 12, 32 comes true for you.

It is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. He loves giving the kingdom. God loves to give.

He does not like to be negotiated with. He loves to give to bankrupt people who want him more than they want anything. So I think the point of the parable is the kingdom of God is so valuable that losing everything on the earth and getting it would be a happy tradeoff.

Or let's be more personal. We can lose everything with joy in order to gain Christ. And it's a good deal.

Don't miss the word joy. I read this parable for 22 years. Well, that's not true.

I didn't start reading when I was born. 22 minus 6. I read this parable and missed that word joy until I was 22 years old. Then I saw it changed everything.

I wrote everything I've written. Every book I have written has been an effort to account for the little phrase Apokaros in Greek. From joy, he sells everything.

Because at 22, I was longing for that. I didn't want to love anything more than I love Jesus. I didn't want to find pleasure in my wife, brand new wife, studies, success.

I just wanted to find Christ to be my all. And there it was. They sold everything with joy.

And I started stumbling everywhere on these statements like, I never made a sacrifice. David Livingstone, Adnarm Judson, Hudson Taylor, after lifetimes of suffering, saying, I never made a sacrifice. Isn't that the point of the parable? From joy, he sells everything he has to have Christ the King.

Not from duty driven, burdensome, oh poor me, Christianity is such a drag. I guess you got to do this stuff anyway to have eternal life. It's the farthest thing from this parable.

But sacrifice is really there. It just happens to be a very happy sacrifice. From joy, he sells all that he has and buys that field.

And so my prayer is that God would make us real at Bethlehem. God would make us real in our affections for Jesus and our love of his salvation. Can I just give you a story that I heard this past week, listening to a tape of a pastor friend of mine.

I'm hesitant to tell you who it is because it's a story about his sister and I don't want to get in any trouble, although it's a totally good story. So here's this pastor and he's telling this story. It really moved me.

I hope it moves you and you take it away. Maybe it's the one thing you'll remember from this message. His sister's married.

They're in their 50s and her husband is dying of cancer. They are both followers of Jesus and they're both filled with faith. And they now have turned their living room into a little hospice and he's dying and will die in a matter of hours probably.

Turned out to be the case. She's sitting beside him and mopping his forehead and visitors are coming to pray and to talk. And one person is so irritated because he's in the prime of his life, mid-50s, and she's sitting there seemingly radiant, radiant with joy and love for this man.

And the person brims over with anger. Says, how can you just sit there in the presence of such terrible evil? Not be more angry or sad. And it was her response that almost knocked me off my treadmill.

She said, my husband deserves to go to hell like you and me. But because of Christ, in a few hours, my husband will be with God in heaven. Is that not worth rejoicing about? You have to have a fairly high level feeling of sin and hell for that to make sense.

My husband deserves to go to hell. And because of Christ, the king, the kingdom, in a few hours, he will stand in the presence of God, accepted. Is that not worth rejoicing about? The goal of treasuring Christ together.

This is why this is in your little folder. I want to explain the connection between what we've just said and this. The goal of treasuring Christ together is to spread that kind of faith that this woman had and her husband had to more and more and more people.

I want you to feel the burden that we, the leaders, the elders of Bethlehem, feel for you and for the ministry of this church. If we love Christ as our highest treasure, like this parable says, and if we love people the way Jesus loved people, ready to lay down his life for his enemies, then we will labor and labor and pray and work and give and sell and streamline and bring our lives into whatever form necessary to spread the value of Christ to more and more and more people here and around the world. We will labor in evangelism, we'll labor in missions, we'll labor in reformation, we'll labor in spiritual awakening.

We won't be content merely to feed ourselves. A church that can be content with who they are and what they are, and the numbers that they are, and the worship that they have, and the preaching that they have, with no burden for the tens of thousands in this city who are on their way to weeping and gnashing of teeth, has not treasured Christ like this. They just haven't.

And we're not that kind of church. The front-end word of our mission statement is spreading. That's why we exist.

We exist to extend to others the treasuring joy that enables us to sell things and give our lives for the kingdom. Hoarded joy rots. Shared joy increases our own.

We're hedonists. We are Christian hedonists. Longing, longing that the lost of Pakistan and Minneapolis and suburbs would treasure Christ with us forever.

Of every stripe, every color, every socioeconomic ranking, every sexual orientation, our longing is to get our arms around those who don't yet treasure Christ and so live and so speak that they can see He's valuable. He's more valuable than anything in the world. You will know that sooner or later.

Let it be sooner. Oh Lord, let it be sooner. That's the goal of treasuring Christ together.

I wish you could share the burden that we have. Because here's the question that the leaders of a church have to ask. You don't have to ask this question.

I invite you to ask it with us. When you have built 60 or 70 ministries that are aimed at spreading a passion for the supremacy of Christ, what do you do if God in His infinite grace grants you some little measure of effectiveness and fruitfulness? What do you do if 3,000 come to the Lord in a day as on Pentecost or in a decade? Where do you park their cars? Where do you put their babies during services? Where do you put the people who would love to hear the word of God and worship together? Where do you put the teenagers who want to start hanging out with teenagers a little bit so they can be more effective at their schools? Where do you put all the 1,200 children? What do you do? And most of you lose very little sleep over that, and the elders live with it day and night. And we want you to live with us.

It's a joyful burden to carry. There are very, very specific questions you have to ask when you carry that burden. We answered the question three years ago, do you build out there on the parking lot a 4,000-person sanctuary and try to buy the Puzak parking lot over here? And we answered, no, we don't think that's where God's leading us.

Instead, we hit upon treasuring Christ together, which is summed up in that little square box. Do you want to just see a summary of it? A multiplying movement of campuses, not one big one, but several smaller ones, like about 2,000 people each. New churches.

We don't want to just have campuses, but independent churches flowing out from here. Global Diaconate. Those men are being funded towards Pakistan largely by the Global Diaconate, plus about \$4,000 people put in my hand last weekend.

That's it. Let me bring you right up to date so you feel how I believe, I'm not God, I don't say this with any absolute authority, I just believe God is blessing this imperfect B-plus venture. I don't think there's anything better we've ever done at Bethlehem than B-plus.

A lot of B-minuses, a lot of C's. I think treasuring Christ together is a B-plus. Last Tuesday night, the elders voted unanimously to recommend to you Rick Melson in two weeks, and he will, God willing, come and have about eight months, Saturday nights and Sunday mornings, mixing it up with Chuck, to prepare us for the launch of campus number three, somewhere in that direction, eight or ten miles.

So this is really current. This part right here, multiplying campuses, that's really current. Secondly, the same elder meeting last Tuesday night, the council voted unanimously to fund the All Nations Christian Fellowship church plant from here with Sherard Burns, John Erickson, and Wally, who leads this worship.

Those three men leading a new church, totally independent church, out from us, launch date March 1 next year. And I think I'm supposed to announce to you that tonight, room 114, if you want to go ask questions about that and say, really, what's that vision about, go to room 114. Is that true, Wally? So go there, right down that way, and ask questions about that church plant.

Now, that will be funded in large measure in its launch pattern from the treasuring Christ together. Here's the third one. Pakistan is going to receive 12 Bethlehem hardworking young men to love the poorest of the poor as many ways as they can because of treasuring Christ together.

So right now, right this very minute, this church is in the middle of feeling the favor of God, yes, to another campus, yes, to a large church plant, yes, to the global diaconate and the poorest of the poor. That is

treasuring Christ together. That's the way the elders have answered the question, not just how do you spread a passion for God's supremacy, but how do you manage when God honors the effort to spread with 4,000 people that weren't there 7 or 8 years ago.

What do you do? You just chase them away and say, we don't want you to make life hard for us here because it is hard to start new campuses. It is hard to pay for buildings. It is hard to disciple 1,200 kids.

It's hard to do teenage work. The ministry is joyfully hard, just like it's hard to sell everything you have in order to have Jesus. Such a deal.

We would not, I would not trade this job for anything in the world. And I think I speak for the entire staff and all the elders here. And you need to simply ask the question, what is my part in this? Because we got word from the financial secretary that a huge percentage of the members, I'm not talking about you people who aren't members, you don't owe us a dime and I don't expect a dime from non-members.

But the members, a huge percentage of the members haven't given anything to treasure in Christ together. It simply blew me away. And so I asked the elders, can I, you know, preach on this? Is this okay for me to just wave this flag again? Because we got to own this if we're going to do it.

And I frankly don't think that's your heart. I don't think the problem here is they don't treasure Jesus. They don't know their Bibles.

I think the problem is we're not doing a good job of communicating the vision and how it works. So let me just close by just explaining briefly how it works. Every member should have a box of envelopes.

If you don't, just ask at the information table and we'll send you one. This is the way I give my offerings to the church. On this envelope, it says church and missions on line one.

That's six million dollars this year, about 30 percent of which is missions and has nothing to do with treasuring Christ together. Not a dime of that money goes to treasuring Christ together, multiplying campuses and paying for them, the global diaconate and church planting. The second line says treasuring Christ together.

I love to take every extra dime I have and put it on that line. I live for this financially. I'd like to tell you more, but it would not be right.

Church and missions here. That's going to go up to seven million dollars next year probably. And here, to pay for this, we have a loan that will balloon on August 2009 and be renegotiated from a poor 0.63 percent interest to whoever knows what the interest will be in 2009.

The amount it takes each month to pay that mortgage is about \$42,000 a month, I think. My request and prayer, I just ask you to join me in prayer, that when August of 2009 rolls around, we don't have to negotiate that loan. It's just over.

It's gone. That would cost \$2.8 million a year between now and then. And so my plea, nothing tonight, just the message, is that you take these envelopes and you pray real hard about that one and you pray real hard about that one.

Church and missions, \$6 million. Treasuring Christ together, \$2.8 million. It's in our pockets.

It is. The thousands of people that come to these six services have that money. Some of you have it because you bought Google shares about five years ago.

And others of you have it for various reasons. And I promise you, you do not have your money to fatten the pad in your cushion and den. You have your money for Christ.

And I don't think Bethlehem is the only place to invest it. I just think if you remember here, treasuring Christ together is a precious gift of God. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, I am so thankful for Bethlehem. Thankful for the Irene Petersons of 80 years of faithfulness. Thankful for the young men and women who pour their lives out here in so many ministries.

And I thank you for those who have given well over \$2 million to treasuring Christ together in the last two years. What an amazing work. Lord, I pray that you would come upon our church with a sense of how precious Christ is.

And then show us what to sell. They sold everything they had to more fully enjoy the work of the kingdom. And I only want it to be joy.

Father, I pray that if a person cannot give out of joy, that they not give. I don't want begrudging giving. The Lord loves a cheerful giver.

And so I pray that in the weeks to come, as we come toward the end of the year, and then just in the long-term vision, that you would come and simply enable us to delight, like the parable says, delight to let goods and kindred go. This mortal life also, the body they may kill, God's truth abideth still. So that we can multiply campuses, start new churches, and care for the poorest of the poor.

80% of everything that goes to treasure in Christ together for the campusing, 10% for the church planting, and 10% for the global diaconate. Oh, Lord God, what a thing you are doing for the nations, for the cities, and for the souls of your people. Would you come and help us operate in Jesus' name? Amen.

Amen. East Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55406 Desiring God exists to help you make God your treasure, because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

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