

Matthew 13:44-53

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Date: 13 September 2026

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[0:00] 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. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.

When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish and baskets, but threw away the bad. This is how it will be at the end of the age.

The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Have you understood all these things? Jesus asked.

Yes, they replied. He said to them, Therefore, every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.

[1:02] When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. Lord, we want to give thanks that though grass withers and flowers fade, your word does endure forever.

Your word is as relevant today as when you first spoke it. And so, Lord, may we of all generations, whether we've been hearing your voice for 80 years or eight weeks, be made able to acknowledge its relevance today.

May our affections be warmed and our minds stirred as we look to you, our great guide and teacher, particularly in this difficult week for many in our fellowship, as we mourn the great loss of our brother, friend and example, Ian.

Amen. In November 2018, a pearl and diamond pendant sold for the equivalent of 28 million pounds at a Sotheby's auction in Geneva, became the most expensive pearl ever purchased. Though a natural oyster pearl, the price paid was surprisingly high given its Baroque drop shape, actually making it more common than the rarer round types.

[2:16] The unique selling point of the pearl was its history. The pearl had been owned by a figure known for her jewellery controversies. She was the highly fashionable queen of France at the time of the French Revolution in the late 1700s.

And some of you know who I mean. This pearl was none other than Marie Antoinette's. The pearl pendant was handed down to her daughter before Marie Antoinette's execution and was passed down the family for the following two centuries until it was then sold by the descendants in 2018. The pearl had become a well-kept secret, unseen to public eyes for about 200 years. And most notably, the great value of the pearl was aligned with the prestige of its former owner and the mysterious intrigue of its history.

The parable in verse 45 of our passage describes the merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds one of great value, he goes and sells everything so that he can buy that pearl.

I'm sure he ever bought Marie Antoinette's pearl for 28 million pounds probably had more cash left in their bank account after their purchase than this merchant did after his purchase.

[3:41] It wasn't that the merchant used 25% of his retirement fund or sold his holiday home in Fort Aventura. He sold everything he had so that he could buy this precious, priceless pearl.

The parable is to us an illustration of the value of the kingdom of heaven. To be part of it is so valuable that it cannot be measured. When it is understood what a privilege it is to be part of the kingdom, all other wealth and worries are resigned.

Let's look at the earlier parable of verse 44. The priceless treasure hidden in a field, perhaps in a jar. And in his joy, the workman sells everything to buy the field so that the treasure can be his. Friends, we could very easily make the mistake of saying that it was oh so difficult for these men to give up all their possessions for the priceless treasures that they find. But notice that for this man, it was an absolute joy to sell everything that he had to buy the field where the treasure was. Whilst extreme, it wasn't a difficult decision for him. It was obvious, fast and decisive. He knew that the treasure was oh so valuable and nothing else would matter if he got it.
[5:17] Jesus is recorded to have said earlier in this gospel that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6, 21.

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Throughout life, our heart will guide us to its treasured location. We will work to get the things that we want in life because our heart treasures them as important.

Being part of the kingdom of heaven is invaluable. No treasure that we see on this earth will match the richness of dwelling with our creator, free from the stains of sin, worshipping him in the light of his glory.

Is this really worth being ready to give up everything we own, holding our possessions and riches lightly? For those whose heart's treasure is hidden in this kingdom, their arm will be ready to push aside anything that gets in the way of reaching that treasure.

For those whose treasure is in the world, their heart will be misdirected. Now, I'm not saying that it is bad to desire to have a nice home for your family or a well-paid job that contributes to society or to get married to a loving spouse and have kids.

[6:41] But if those things become our greatest desire, our greatest treasure, our main aim in life, we will find ourselves ultimately unsatisfied.

Jesus' kingdom comes first and everything else comes after. No wonder that the 12 gates to the new Jerusalem are described in Revelation 21 as being like pearls.

Entrance into this new Jerusalem is such a valuable, precious and privileged gift. So, freshers, you are going to find plenty of stuff to do during your time here.

The University of Stirling has plenty of clubs and societies, sports teams, nice girls, nice guys, overly priced pizza. The city of Stirling has many pubs and restaurants, one below-average nightclub and an above-average Tesco superstore.

May I encourage you, though, to remember that the most valuable thing and all the changes that are about to happen in the next few weeks is going to be your faith. It may become a challenge to keep up a regular routine of quiet time, prayer, getting out to church in the busyness of all the other options and opportunities that take up our time.

[8:03] At times, this term is going to feel stressful, perhaps frustrating, maybe homesick, but remember the joy that is to be found in knowing Jesus and having him as your saviour.

God has brought you here this morning for a reason. His kingdom is for you. Make sure your heart is set on it or you'll be led to the wrong place. Now, here at Cornerstone, every Sunday, we do what is called expository preaching.

And at its heart, that means we say what God says in the way that God says it for the purpose that God said it. Most of the time, we do this by going through books of the Bible and preaching through a series of passages chronologically.

It's important to caveat, though, that we do not preach textually. We do not just treat the Bible like a primary school comprehension task. We believe that the Bible is God's eternal and living word, which he has left for his people so that they may know him.

As a source of all truth in life, we therefore do not treat the Bible simply as dry historical evidence to make us feel intellectually superior. We wholeheartedly believe that knowing the meaning of God's word and how to apply it to our lives is the most excitable knowledge of all which can change us from the heart.

[9:32] Expository preaching also means that we don't leave anything out. We teach the passages which we heard rarely in our Sunday school classes. We pay attention to those phrases that contain difficult truths.

We trust that God has told us the important things we need to know and that all his words are worth listening to. And folks, let's all be honest for a moment. Some of us have heard several sermons on the parable of the sower or the parable of the mustard seed.

Though very few of us, I think, will often think of their close neighbor, this parable, the parable of the net. As we've seen in earlier parables of the sower and the weeds, the kingdom of heaven is exclusive and particular.

It's not for everybody. And this parable of the net in verses 47 to 50 repeats a similar warning. The fishermen let down a net into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.

Then they sit on the shore collecting the good fish into baskets, but those bad, useless fish they throw away. This is a practice that Jesus' fishing fanatic followers would have been familiar with and would probably have done this type of sorting regularly, not knowing the significance, the spiritual significance of such a task.

[10 : 56] It says that in the parable, the fishermen are like God's angels and the good and bad fish are like the righteous and the wicked people. The angels will separate these two and will throw the wicked into a blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Weeping and gnashing of teeth is never a good thing. It's understandably, it's a feeling or experience that we wouldn't ever choose. Yet this same phrase is used several times in this gospel to highlight the destination of the wicked.

Matthew couldn't have been clearer about it. The kingdom of heaven is particular. It doesn't include the wicked. It only includes those who have been made righteous by Jesus Christ.

Though the parable is a very sharp one, it's hardly a surprising one. In the Psalms, the wicked are the ones who gnash their teeth at the righteous. The ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah burned like smoke from a furnace.

And Egypt, the great oppressor of Israel, is described as an iron smelting furnace. In fact, as we often find, Jesus is not really saying very many new things with this parable.

[12 : 15] His judgment is always clear and consistent. At the end of the age, the wicked will be deservedly thrown into the furnace. Now, therefore, how blessed are we that Jesus Christ, the righteous one, has saved us wicked people from his righteous judgment, that we are wicked people made righteous who enter into this kingdom by a righteousness that does not belong to ourselves.

I hope that by mentioning this parable, everything else I say about Jesus in this sermon will be made to sound even better. Because without him, this is where we would deserve to go.

He is saving us from the wrath of God, which we deserve. I want to remind us all this week that our fellowship remembers with joy and with sorrow the life of a man.

He was one of the most approachable and warm Christian men you could ever meet. And though I've spent a few minutes talking about bad fish and God's wrath, please let us remember that men like Ian stand as an example of a particularly good fish who is undoubtedly rejoicing with the angels in heaven.

Righteousness through Christ and sanctification by his spirit is made possible and available for they who recognize the value of faith in Jesus and take this remarkable course of life shaped by his love and grace.

[13 : 53] Don't go home feeling discouraged by this parable. Righteousness in Christ is available and we thank God that he has given us so many living examples of what it means to live our whole lives for him.

So the kingdom is priceless and precious. It's also exclusive in particular. One may ask, how then do we enter it?

Well, I think four things help us here. Firstly, the purpose of the parables helps us. This passage closes a chapter which contains several parables. These parables serve to build a sense of inquiry and urgent desire for knowledge among his disciples whilst also showing up the ignorant will of many in the crowd.

In verse 36, the disciples come to him and ask him to explain the meaning of the parable. They had heard the significance of the parable of the weeds and wanted to find out more.

However, it was not so with the wicked of their generation. In verse 15, it has told us that their hearts were calloused and whilst their physical ears heard the content of the parable, their spiritual ears were deaf to its significance.

[15 : 08] So folks, if you hear these three parables and your heart is moved by them, that is probably a sign that your ears are hearing correctly. Step one to entering the kingdom of heaven is understanding its significance.

Do you desire to know more? Is your heart convinced and convicted by these things? We'll never stop searching for more meaning. With greater knowledge should come a deeper appreciation and a greater thanksgiving.

Secondly, Marie Antoinette's pearl pendant surely helps us here. Remember, it was not merely the pearl itself that gave it its value.

It was the significance of the previous owner. The mysterious nature added value to the gem when it was revealed by the queen's descendants after 200 years in hiding.

Likewise, wouldn't we say that the kingdom of heaven's value is not only to do with its inherent value, but the value comes from the significance of its owner.

[16 : 15] These parables were highly valuable because they showed something of the mystery of Christ that had been hidden for ages and generations, which was now being revealed to the saints.

This is the essence of verses 51 and 52, where he asks if the disciples have understood all these things. Yes, they replied.

He said to them, The teaching of the Jewish leaders is like a repetitious curriculum on old things, things that everyone has seen before.

Yet the disciples of the kingdom bring out new and exciting treasures to help explain the old ones. Jesus Christ is the missing centerpiece of the jigsaw puzzle of the Old Testament.

Jesus is like the identity of the mysterious character in a mystery novel who's the key to the whole story. When Jesus comes on the scene, it's like the penny drop, the click, the aha moment of the narrative of God's word.

[17 : 33] As he has done before in Matthew, Jesus is again making a point to the Jewish readers that you need to understand the Old Testament in a new way.

You need to start pouring new wine into new wineskins. We're not just seeking the pleasures of the heaven. We're seeking the king of the kingdom of heaven.

It wasn't just any old pearl. It was the fashionable Queen of France's pearl. This kingdom is not just a pleasant place where you'd like to go after you die. This is the kingdom of God full of unworthy souls made righteous by the precious blood of his son who will be united to him in a world free from sin where we will worship him with pure hearts and eager minds.

Our way in is through righteousness. But it's not our own righteousness. It's a righteousness that has been given to us by the king which demonstrates itself in our sanctification.

Brothers and sisters, what special mercy and grace is ours that we who would have been counted as those wicked, useless fish have become worthy and righteous through our saviour's cleansing.

[18 : 51] It is Jesus, the owner of this kingdom who has been graciously revealed to us that gives this kingdom such great value. Verse 17 of this chapter says that many prophets and righteous people longed to see what we see but did not see it.

It is a great privilege to live in this post-messianic age and we ought not to take that privilege for granted. Thirdly, I think our two finders of verse 44 to 46 help us.

In the pursuit of the kingdom of Jesus, our treasure will continue to direct the course of our heart and it's perhaps concurrent. Our treasure directs our heart yet our heart also directs our treasure. One of these men wasn't really looking for anything and came across the treasure. The other had been searching and found his price. Perhaps you've not really considered this in any big way before.

Perhaps mum or dad has brought you along but you don't really want to be here. Do you see the value of this gift? To be welcomed in this kingdom despite your wickedness.

[20 : 08] To be made righteous despite our wrongfulness. To be with Jesus despite our waywardness to so often live for ourselves. Guys, this is truly a treasure.

Or perhaps you're like the second man, the merchant searching for fine pearls. Perhaps you've been searching for some other fine pearls to bring you joy. We just got back from a holiday in Italy this week and it was beautiful.

Yet I'm so relieved that the positivity in my life doesn't come from looking forward to my next holiday or weekend or birthday party. These things are great but they are finite and limited.

Ultimately, they will not satisfy us. great joy in life is found when we move distractions away so that we can get the treasure.

One of my favourite artists is the American folk hymn writer Michael Card. And I was blessed to listen to many of his songs on long car journeys as a child which means I now knew many of the

choruses off by heart.

[21:18] And let me quote perhaps my favourite of all his songs Things We Leave Behind and I'll try my best to say it rather than sing it.

Every heart needs to be set free from possessions that hold it so tight. For freedom's not found in the things that we own. It's the power to do what is right.

With Jesus our only possession then giving becomes our delight. And we can't imagine the freedom we find from the things that we leave behind. We show a love for the world in our lives by worshipping goods we possess.

But Jesus says lay all your treasures aside and love God above all the rest. For when we say no to the things of the world we open our hearts to the love of the Lord.

It's hard to imagine the freedom we find from the things that we leave behind. Friends if we want to see the value of Jesus more clearly we can help ourselves out by laying aside our earthly treasures and saying no to the things of the world.

[22:28] We are not just mere ascetics. By that I mean we don't give things up for nothing. We get rid of things so that we can find the freedom of entering this kingdom.

An unimaginable freedom for many who are so used to the pleasures of the world. But as we shift the clouds away we see the sun more clearly don't we? You know it's no wonder that in the gospels the poor were so much more receptive to Jesus than the rich.

they were less distracted by other good things. The suffering in their lives at times caused by the great sin they had committed caused them to joyfully reach out to Jesus because they had learned that nothing else would satisfy them but him.

The parable of the net reminds us that in our earthly lives we must keep our eternal destination in mind. Keep searching for this treasure this priceless gift.

search to understand the value of it. Why not get rid of some things that distract you to help you appreciate the treasure more clearly? These two men happily and joyfully gave up everything so that they could get the best thing.

[23:45] Surely verses 44 to 46 are two sentences of the Bible with great significance. And so lastly and really I'm just reiterating an earlier point.

Let's never make the mistake of thinking that our entrance to this kingdom is based on our righteousness. You know we may think that being a good or righteous fish is arbitrarily dependent on whether we're a decent person who is liked by most people.

But folks can I remind us that without Jesus wickedness is all we bring to the pearly gates. the righteousness we have is the righteousness given to us by Jesus and grown in us by his spirit.

It is not a reward before it is a great gift. This is why this kingdom is like such precious treasure. We are so unworthy and therefore so privileged to be given entrance into this great kingdom.

and when we understand how unworthy we are we become unblinded to see the value of the hidden treasure and we can make our entrance into the enjoyment of Jesus' kingdom which is our life school.

[25:10] Let me pray. Psalm 119 says how can a young person stay on the path of purity by living according to your word.

I seek you with all my heart do not let me stray from your commands I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Lord God may the treasure of your word and your kingdom be deeply rooted in our hearts this week.

Where our treasure is may our hearts be there also. We are so thankful for your righteousness which gives us entrance into your kingdom. So come quickly Lord Jesus for we patiently await to worship you in your glorious reign and may you deepen this desire in our hearts this week.

Amen. Amen. Amen.