

Sermon on the Parables of Treasure and Pearl Matt 13:44-46/2Peter 1:3-8

Today we are looking at 2 of the many parables that Jesus told about what the Kingdom of God is like. Before we started this series, I said that parables have a prophetic as well as a teaching element. The prophetic element here is the Kingdom of God itself. Jesus talked a lot about the Kingdom of God and often said that it was near or even here, but what did He mean, what do we mean when we talk about the Kingdom of God? Well the simplest explanation would be the Spiritual realm over which God reigns and the fulfilment of God's will here on earth. And that is of course where we get the now and not yet of the prophetic. God has always reigned supreme over the heavens but temporarily the enemy, the prince of this world, the prince of darkness has been allowed some authority here on earth. The death and resurrection of Jesus brought about the beginning of the end of that authority as it ushered in the reign of Christ, the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth. That work will be completed at the end of time when Satan will finally be defeated, the old will pass away and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. In the meantime, as believers we live as citizens of the Kingdom of God in the overlap between the time before Jesus came and the end of time. All of that is hard to take in and needs some thinking about, but basically it means that we belong to God and heaven is our home, even though we still live out our lives in this temporal world. Another definition or aspect of the Kingdom of Heaven would be the lives of those who belong to it, that would be our lives and how we live in relation to God.

In our parables one man stumbles upon the treasure accidentally. He was not looking for it, but when he saw it, he knew that he had to sell everything he owned to get it. The other man, presumably a

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wealthy man, a merchant, was searching for fine pearls and found one of the greatest value. Again he was moved to sell everything he had in order to gain this great treasure. These parables are echoed in the life of Justin early in the second century. Justin was a brilliant professor, a scholar who had tried all of the great schools of philosophy but remained unsatisfied. One day he spoke to an old man in a field who told Justin about Jesus. He immediately started to read the Christian scriptures to see if it was true. He found that it was and became a joyful Christian, even though that led eventually to him being martyred.

So people come across the Kingdom of God, find faith, in many different ways, but when they find it they know that it is the most precious thing to have.

Our reading in 2 Peter is really about the outworking of faith, of being a citizen of the Kingdom of God, in our lives. Peter is very clear, it is very clear throughout the New Testament, that the promises of God, the forgiveness of our sins, new life in Christ, citizenship of the Kingdom of God are a free gift. There is nothing we could do to earn them; all we have to do is to accept them, to acknowledge Jesus as our God and King. At the same time this free gift will cost us everything because in order to accept this free gift of new life, we have to be prepared to lay down our old lives. Jesus said, "whoever tries to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it". We cannot have two masters, we are either citizens of this world or we lay down our citizenship of this world, give everything that we have, in order to gain the pearl of great price which is belonging to the Kingdom of Heaven. There is no dual citizenship. When Prince Philip wanted to marry princess

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Elizabeth, as she was then, he had to renounce his Greek citizenship. He couldn't have one foot in both camps, and neither can we. And that is why we must live as those who belong to God. We too have been bought or ransomed at a great cost, the highest cost, the very blood of Jesus. And so we must make every effort to support our faith with goodness and knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, mutual affection and most importantly with love. We are not just left on our own to work this out, to struggle to become more like Jesus in our own strength. No, we have been given the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit of love itself so that when we seek His help we will not be ineffectual but we will grow in faith, grow in strength, grow in love and we will be fruitful. If we believe in Jesus, if we choose to follow Him then we have found the greatest treasure. It really is up to each one of us to decide how much that treasure is worth to us. If we receive it half-heartedly and carry on in our old lives and old habits then, like the seed that fell on stony ground or shallow ground or among thorns, we will at best be ineffective and unfruitful, our faith will grow slowly if at all. If, like Justin we receive this treasure whole heartedly and give ourselves wholly to it then our lives, like his, will be transformed. This is what we were made for, human beings were made to be in relationship with God, we were made to be citizens of the Kingdom of God. When we find it and give ourselves to it, then we are made whole, as Jesus says we will find the life that we were made for, we will find perfect freedom, purpose and peace.