The Parables of the Treasure and Pearl – Sermon Notes - Sunday 28.08.22 – Nathan Gray

*Introduction*

Over August we’ve been going through the greatest stories ever told: the parables of Jesus. Martin kicked us off with the parable of the sower looking at our response to the gospel. Pete preached last week on the parable of the talents which is all about our service: how do we use our time, treasure, and talents? Now, we’ve come to the end of our journey, today we’re looking at the parables of the treasure and the pearl and they’re all about the end of the journey.

They sit at the end of Matthew chapter 13, sometimes known as the seven kingdom parables, and that’s exactly how these two parables start: ‘the kingdom of heaven is like.’ So first we’re going to work out what that means, what is the kingdom of heaven? Then there are 3 alliterative points I want to draw out from these parables. And then we’ll close with how this applies to us today.

*So, what is the kingdom of heaven?*

Matthew absolutely loves this phrase. It only appears in the book of Matthew and appears over 30 times. Why? Why the kingdom of *heaven* and not the kingdom of *God* which he only uses 4 times?

I think Matthew wants to highlight to his Jewish audience that God’s kingdom is spiritual, not physical. As the creator of the universe, he does rule over earth and heaven, but the *kingdom* of heaven is not just that. God is king over his people. This isn’t an earthly kingdom like the United Kingdoms of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This is a spiritual kingdom that includes everyone who calls God ‘king.’ That is all of God’s followers throughout history, that is those of us here on earth now and those already called home to heaven. What all these people share is the Christian faith, the belief in God as king because of his saving love that reunites us with him in this life and will be fulfilled in spending eternity together.

That is the heart of the kingdom of heaven – God’s gift of eternal life and our journey with him towards it. As Paul writes, *‘I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.’ Philippians 3:14*

So that is the phrase I’m going to use this morning, eternal life, I think that best describes our relationship to the kingdom of heaven. And I want to draw out three points about eternal life from these parables. These two parables underline that eternal life is precious, eternal life is priceless, and eternal life is pressing.

*Eternal life is precious*

It seems obvious to say that eternal life is precious but that is the point of these two parables.

Picture the man digging in this field. We don’t know why he’s there, but it isn’t his field, he’s not a treasure hunter otherwise he would have stolen the treasure, so imagine his surprise when he hears a clunk against his spade. The very thing he never knew he needed above all else has landed in front of him.

Then think about the merchant who spends his life looking for pearls, it’s his job, he’s probably seen hundreds of pearls in his lifetime. But one day he comes across this pearl of great value. This is not like any other pearl. Besides joy, he’s probably overcome with a sense of triumph. This is not only the greatest thing he’s ever seen, but also the completion of his job, his life’s endeavours.

For both of these men, the discovery of these items of great value consumes them. They can’t think about anything else, they have to own the treasure and the pearl, so they both sell everything they have to obtain them.

This is what the gift of eternal life is like. Whether we happen across it or spend our lives searching for it, our salvation immediately becomes our most precious possession.

We know we are muddied. We know we are like a malfunctioning machine, more than that we are deliberately rebellious sons and daughters. We are completely undeserving of eternal life and nothing we can do will get us any closer, however much we may try. But God made a way.

This ticket to heaven was not won through our own ability, yet it fulfils us. When we try in our own ability to find hope and happiness in this life, it often leads to regret and unfulfillment. Whereas the gift of eternal life heals our longing, it satisfies our souls, it promises a certain infinite hope and promises a persevering, sustaining earthly hope.

What else can compare? What else can fulfil us? What else can give us hope in this life and of another after death?

What could be more precious than eternal life with the almighty God?

*2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” – Revelation 21*

*Eternal life is priceless*

When I say that eternal life is priceless, I am not repeating myself on the value of eternal life, but I am talking about a price. Not that we can earn eternal life, as I’ve already said, salvation is a free gift from God. But we must be willing to pay every price under the sun to claim the crown of everlasting life.

Let us consider these two men again. The most glaring similarity between these two parables is they went and sold **all they had**. Nothing was going to get in the way of them buying the field and the pearl. And there is no hint of resentment, one of them even goes in joy! I love this image from a children’s Bible story book, he’s only left with a shirt and his underwear, and he’s jumping for joy holding the pearl in the air.

So it should be with us. Eternal life is a gift so precious it requires the joyful sacrifice of everything we have.

Most of us will be familiar with the story of the rich man in Matthew 19. Jesus says to his disciples there, “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” Peter follows this up with typical Peter boldness, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?” to which Jesus replies, “Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”

We cannot allow anything in our life to hold us back from entering the kingdom of heaven. It could be our clothes (*kick off shoes*) or our image. Do we need to spend less money on ourselves and more money on others or missions or the church? It could be our homes (*throw keys*). Do we shut ourselves in from the world or do we fling our doors wide and welcome the friend, the neighbour, and the stranger in for generous hospitality? It could be a person or a group of people (*hold up phone*). Is there someone in my contacts or a friend on Facebook that I cannot lose? That I would rather remain in a relationship with than follow Jesus? Or someone whose opinion I value more than his? (*Throw phone*). It could be our time. Would I rather earn a few more hours of pay than go to church or home group? Am I lazy with my time?

I haven’t even begun to mention the daily sacrifices we make by following Jesus. The changes in our character, our relationships and the use of our time that could take us far in the world but won’t take hold of eternal life.

*“14 For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. 15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. 16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” – Hebrews 13*

Is there a price we aren’t willing to pay? However small or big, the danger with that is we become too self-focussed and hard of heart that we refuse the precious gift of salvation.

I don’t say any of this to make us feel bad this morning. This is tough listening, and many of you will have already felt the struggle of sacrifice or are feeling this now. I was chatting to a brother last week who was battling the forgiveness of a relative. Tori and I attended a secular wedding on Friday and turned down alcohol to the tune of “loser.” On a bigger scale, we hear countless stories of Muslim converts being banished from their families, and it isn’t uncommon in the west too, though on a less severe scale.

So, I want to use this opportunity to encourage you. Whether you have fought through past sacrifices and aren’t sure if it was worth the cost, if you are contending with sacrifice right now, or you are afraid of a future of losses, hear again the promise Jesus makes: “Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake **will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life**.” The final words of Matthew 19, “many who are last will be first.”

The apostle Paul is such a wonderful example, going back to Philippians 3, *“7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.”*

And if you would like a great modern example, I was moved at Pat’s thanksgiving service when Roy shared some of Pat’s final words: “I love my family very much, but I love Jesus more.”

*Eternal life is pressing*

Eternal life is precious, eternal life is priceless, and finally, eternal life is pressing.

There is an urgency to these parables. Let’s put ourselves in their shoes one more time.

Again, you are digging in a field that is not your own. We assume you are there for moral reasons, but if you are there for moral reasons there may be others there too, even some immoral characters lurking about. The treasure you have just discovered is sitting in the open, you’ve got to hide it, sell everything you own and buy that field now! Or you may never see it again.

I can’t also be the only pearl merchant in this region. When I hit the marketplace and see this pearl, it’s not like Amazon or Waterstones, it won’t be there tomorrow, they won’t have it back in stock next week, you have to sprint away, sell everything you own and buy that pearl or the next chump in line will.

Not that someone is waiting in line to take our place in heaven but you get a sense of the necessity to grab eternal life, the need to do it now.

I feel this has been a theme amongst us at Manor Park recently. I remember a month ago when Pete preached on repentance, and he made it clear that the time is now. We cannot think that eternal life is something nice we can deal with later. I remember sitting in Roy’s home group the following Wednesday discussing that we don’t know when we’re going to die, when anyone will so we have to be urgent with the gospel to ourselves and others. The following week our dear brother Joe passed away. It was a massive shock to see a healthy young man pass away but we praise God that he was a believer and is in a much better place. It certainly hit home Pete’s sermon to me and has been on my mind as I prepare this one.

Eternal life should always be our most pressing concern. I thank the Lord for leading me to this phrase. Not only because it gave me the third P, but it speaks to the believer as well as the unbeliever.

If you are not a believer, eternal life is pressing, do not wait to take hold of this precious, precious gift, Jesus died for you so that when you die whenever that will be, you can join with him in everlasting happiness.

If you are a believer and questioning why eternal life would be pressing for you, then remember that whilst our conversion is a glorious one-time event, we must be watchful over the rest of our Christian walk. When I say eternal life should always be our most pressing concern, I paraphrase more of Paul’s words from Philippians 3,

*“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*

*Application*

Eternal life is precious, eternal life is priceless, and eternal life is pressing. When we come to apply this parable to our lives, there are three straightforward questions we must challenge ourselves with, whether you are a believer or not.

* Is eternal life my most precious possession?
* Is there a price I am not willing to pay to take hold of eternal life?
* Is eternal life my most pressing concern?

I hope that we will reflect and meditate on these in the coming days and in home groups, if this is all you take from this morning’s sermon then I will be happy, and I pray those reflections will bless you.

But there is one more application for this parable.

The parables are well-known pieces of scripture with well-known messages so you may have sat through this morning thinking “I know all of this. I know eternal life is precious, I know I have to sacrifice, I know it’s always a pressing issue.” But that’s the point. Think of the disciples listening to these parables. Peter’s cry in chapter 19 is quite apt, *“We have left everything to follow you!”* James and John left their father in a boat and left the family business. Matthew left his lucrative job as a tax collector and the protection of the Romans that came with that. So why is Jesus telling them these parables?

Of the seven kingdom parables in Matthew 13, half are addressed publicly to a crowd of people, and half are addressed privately to the disciples as these two are. The half addressed to the crowd aren’t explained, as Martin told us with the parable of the sower, they are designed to disguise the truth. The other half, however, Jesus explains in a private teaching session to his disciples and at the close of this teaching session he asks them, *“Have you understood all these things?” “Yes,” they replied. 52 He [Jesus] 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.”*

The purpose of these parables was not solely to reiterate old ideas but to encourage the disciples to teach old truths with a new application. Ultimately these old truths about heaven find new understanding in Christ, especially for the disciples, but these two parables are also primed for old truths to be taught with personal and unique illustration.

Imagine the merchant placing the pearl on his mantlepiece, not that he had a house at this point. For the sake of image, he has sold everything but the mantlepiece. He shows off the pearl and tells everyone who will listen the story of how precious this pearl is and everything he had to give up to get it.

In a similar way, we can use these parables to share our faith. As we put the pearl of eternal life on the mantlepiece of our lives, we can use the treasure and the pearl to explain why eternal life is so precious to us. As we describe the men selling all they had, we can explain the sacrifices we have made, big and small, and why it is so worth it.

My ultimate prayer for this morning’s sermon is that we will find personal encouragement from these parables and those meditations, *and* we will also take this tool that Jesus has laid out for us to share our faith.

*Let’s pray…*

Father God,

We are ever thankful for sending your son to die for our sins so that we can be reunited with you. We look forward to the day when we can see you face to face and praise your name forever. We know you call us to a life of sacrifice, but we confess we are often selfish or fail to live up to the standard your son set on the cross. Give us the strength and the courage to pay any cost necessary to claim the crown you have won for us. May the great gift of eternal life always be on our lips and in our actions and lead us as we share with our neighbours your glory in our lives. Amen.