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Matthew 13:44 - 13:46



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg delves into two short parables from Matthew 13:44-46, discussing the value of the kingdom of God and the sacrifice made by Jesus for humanity. In the parable of the treasure, Gregg highlights the worth of the kingdom surpassing all earthly possessions and describes how the purchase of a field to obtain the treasure represents Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. The parable of the pearl further emphasizes the need to devote every aspect of one's life to serving God. Gregg concludes by emphasizing the importance of being wholly devoted to God in order to receive salvation.

Transcript

In today's broadcast, we'll be looking at two very short parables. Together, the two of them only occupy three verses. In Matthew chapter 13, taught by Jesus in this chapter that is quite loaded with parables of this type.

When I say of this type, I mean this, that all the parables in this chapter are said to be parables concerning the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, as Jesus calls it in Matthew. I'm going to begin reading at Matthew 13, verses 44 through 46. Jesus said, Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid, and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he has found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. Now, there's two parables, but one thought, at least one overriding thought of both of them. Because both of them end up with somebody selling all that he has to obtain the thing that represents, in the parable, the kingdom of God.

In the first parable, the kingdom of God is likened to a treasure. In the second parable, it is likened to an exceptional pearl of surpassing value. And another kind of a treasure, I guess we could say.

Now, both of these things are exceedingly valuable things. So that if a person, the average person finding one, would see that these things are valuable beyond the combined worth of everything else that he has. So that if he had to part with all else to

obtain them, he would think himself having gained in the bargain.

Now, we must assume, therefore, that the treasure in the parable was an exceedingly great treasure whose worth surpassed all the possessions the man owned. And that the pearl of great price was indeed of such a great price that all the other pearls the man had and all the other possessions he had could not equal its value. And therefore, simply being a shrewd bargainer, the man in each case would gladly part with what he already had in order to gain this more valuable commodity, the kingdom of God.

Now, the message of both parables, in one sense, is one. It is that the kingdom of God is of fantastic value. And that it is worth more than everything else combined.

And applied to the man who is seeking the kingdom of God, it suggests that if he has to forfeit all that he had previously in order to become a citizen of the kingdom and to have a part in the kingdom of God, to inherit the kingdom, that person has gained by doing so. So let's look at these parables because this is the message that seems to be paramount in both of them. Although it is possible that there is a different angle that each parable is showing us.

The first parable has more detail than the second, in a way, because the kingdom is said to be a treasure. However, it is said to be a treasure that is hidden in a field. And a man finds it and then he hides it again in the field.

And then he goes out and sells what he has and buys the field so that he can own the treasure. What is the background to this scenario? Well, in Israel, for centuries, the people of Israel were insecure. Because they were overrun by mighty nations both to the north and the south that would come in.

And sometimes they would invade Israel just for the sake of conquering Israel. Other times they would go parading through Israel in order to get somewhere else. Like the Syrians used to go through Israel in order to invade Egypt.

And the Egyptians went through Israel to invade or to do battle against Babylon or whatever. And so Israel was kind of in the middle of things. And periodically there were just armies that marched through.

And when they marched through, they sometimes didn't just stay to the high roads. They sometimes would rape and pillage and steal. Now this being so, if a man had any kind of substantial wealth, let's say some amount of gold or something that he'd gathered, he could not safely necessarily keep it in his house.

Because the next army that came through might just pillage and take it all. So it was very common for people to bury the things they had of value in the fields. And of course the armies coming through would not dig up the whole fields looking for them.

And so the invaders would go on through and would not find these treasures. However, it must not have been uncommon for a man to bury his goods in the field and then himself to die. And no one knows that the field has a treasure in it.

I mean, if an army was coming, let's say somebody heard that the Syrians were on their way, going through Israel to Egypt, any Israelite might well take all the money he had and bury it out in his field. He might not even have time to tell anyone he'd done so. And he might even not want to tell anyone he'd done so.

But if, as the Syrians went through, they killed the man, his secret would die with him and the treasure would be in the field for someone else to find maybe hundreds of years later, if it was ever found at all. So Jesus pictures a man who finds a treasure in a field. Now this isn't his field.

He has to go out and buy it. So we should imagine the scenario, no doubt, that this man is in another man's field doing something by which he might find a buried treasure there, probably plowing. The man in question then would probably be a hired laborer who is hired to plow another man's field.

Now as he is plowing, the edge of his plow hits on something solid, doesn't sound like a rock, and the man digs around there and he finds there a little chest and in that chest are, let's say, gold coins, maybe even diamonds and jewels. Now this man realizes that the owner of the field is unaware that this treasure is there. This treasure might have been buried generations ago.

And so the man who has found it, he doesn't have the right to take it because it's not on his property. But he knows that the owner of the property is not aware that the treasure is there and is therefore not aware of the value of owning that property. And so having discovered this treasure, he buries it again, puts it back where he found it.

And then he says, I'm going to buy this field. And he goes out and he sells everything he has and he buys the field. Now he's able to probably buy the field at the cost of bare land.

And therefore, even though he may be a man not very wealthy, he may have enough to buy an acre or two or a portion of field that contains his treasure. Especially since the owner has no idea that that treasure is in it. And therefore, the man buys the field.

And once he holds title to the field, of course, the treasure belongs to him. Some people have said, well, that doesn't sound very honest to do. Well, it's neither particularly honest or dishonest.

It's just a matter that he knows of a value in that field that the seller does not. I don't know that a person is obligated to educate a seller of all the things that he finds desirable about his property so that the guy can jack the price up when he buys it. I think

that he simply knows that there's value in that field that no one else but he knows about and it's worth it to him.

Actually, since the owner doesn't even know the treasure is there, the field is not worth much to him except the price of a field because he hasn't found the treasure and may never find it. It may never be of value to him. But the one who knows the treasure is there, obviously the field has a special value to him.

So the man goes out and he buys the field. And in buying the field, he obtains, of course, mineral rights to the property and that includes all the gold and whatever he found there in the field. He's bought himself a treasure.

And of course, that's the only reason he bought the field. He didn't buy the field because he wanted to have another acre to own. He wanted the treasure.

But he had to buy the field in order to have it. Okay? How should we understand that? What is Jesus getting at? I believe... Let me suggest to you a possibility. I'm going to suggest to you that the man in this case is Jesus.

Now, there are other ways to understand it, of course. It could be a generic. It could be just any man who finds or sees the kingdom of God should be willing to forfeit all he has to obtain it.

And I believe that that is true. But I'm going to suggest that in this parable, that's not the point that Jesus is making. But that he's making the point that Jesus himself values the kingdom of God.

And by the kingdom of God, we have to understand the church. Because all through the parables of Jesus, Jesus makes it clear that the kingdom of heaven is consistent of people. The sons of the kingdom in the parable of the wheat and the tares.

The kingdom of God is really... It's the citizens, the subjects of God. And therefore, that's the people that follow Jesus Christ. They are his kingdom.

They are his subjects. They are his church. The kingdom of God in the New Testament is roughly the same thing as the true church.

The followers of Christ. Now, that being so, Jesus valued the church. He valued his followers so much that he gave up all that he had in order to purchase the church.

Now, all that he had, what was it? Well, we read in scripture that before Jesus came to earth, he was, in fact, in the form of God. He had all power and all knowledge. He had possession of all things.

He was invulnerable to pain or temptation or death. He was in an elevated state equal to that of God himself, the Father. Now, not all agree with that, but that seems to be the

teaching of scripture.

That Jesus was equal to God. He was equal to the Father. And yet, he came down and became a poor man.

And he was subject to pain and death and all kinds of discomforts. He lived in poverty. He forfeited, not permanently, but he spent all that he had in order to come down that he might die and make the payment necessary to obtain the church for himself, the kingdom of God, to buy that treasure.

And I'm going to suggest that Jesus is referring to himself as the man who discovered this treasure and forfeited or paid all that he had in order to buy it so he could own it. But having suggested that, we have another detail of the parable to consider. The man didn't simply buy the treasure.

He bought the field so that he could own the treasure. Now, Jesus does not anywhere explain these parables, so we're left to a certain degree of conjecture, but we can make educated guesses based on what Jesus said elsewhere. In the parable of the wheat and the tares, Jesus said the field is the world.

Now, if the field is the world in this parable, then we could argue that the man who bought the field, if Jesus is the man, he bought the world in order that he could obtain the church that was in the world. That the church was like a treasure hidden in a field. But he couldn't just go buy the treasure.

He had to buy the field in order to obtain the treasure that was in it. And that Jesus did not simply buy the church when he died. He bought the world so that he could obtain the church.

Now, many of you out there might think that I've said nothing controversial in saying that. However, that is a greatly controversial point, because Reformed Christianity has always taught that Jesus only purchased the church. This is what is referred to usually as the doctrine of the limited atonement, or of particular redemption.

It is the view of Calvinism. It is the third point of Calvinism of the five points. But that view holds that Jesus did not die for the sins of the whole world.

He died only for the redemption of his people, the church. Now, I don't have time to sort through all the arguments for and against this doctrine. But the principal reason for people saying it is because there are many reasons.

One of them is that it logically flows from the other points of Calvinism. And if the other points of Calvinism are true, then it would seem that this doctrine would be true. But in terms of scriptural support for the doctrine of limited atonement, there are many scriptures where the Bible says that Jesus died for his people, died for his church.

Remember, Jesus said, He's the good shepherd, and the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. Or it says in Acts chapter 20, in verse 28, I think it says that Jesus purchased the church with his own blood. And we do read in Ephesians chapter 5 that the church is like a bride to Christ.

And he gave himself for the church in order that he might purify it and so forth. Now, to say that Jesus gave himself for the church, that the good shepherd laid down his life for his sheep, that Jesus purchased the church with his own blood, these statements are, in the minds of some people, indicative that Jesus only died for his own people and he did not die for anyone else. However, that's not necessarily how we have to understand such words.

You see, the man who bought the field bought the field in order to get the treasure. One could argue that when he spent all his money, that he did it to buy the treasure. And if we said that, that would be very true.

That's what he was buying. He got a field in the deal. But he wanted the treasure.

He didn't spend all he had to obtain a field, he did it to obtain a treasure. But he had to buy the field in order to get the treasure. Now, in the same sense, if the field in this parable were the world, and the man Jesus, and the treasure, the church, we could argue that when Jesus died and paid the price he did, he died for the whole world.

He purchased the whole world. But he did so because his church was in the world and he wanted to obtain it. Therefore, it would not be wrong, even under that scenario, to say he died for the church, or that he purchased the church, or he laid down his life for his sheep.

Those things would all be true, even if Jesus died for the whole world. Now, there are many things in the scripture that suggest that Jesus did die for the whole world. John the Baptist said, Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the whole world.

John said in 1 John 2 that Jesus gave his life not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And I believe that the Bible teaches that when Jesus died, he made payment for the sins of all mankind. That he tasted death, as it says in Hebrews, for every man.

And that being so, it is like the man who bought the field to obtain the treasure. And I think that that is what Jesus did. And then the next parable is about a man finding a pearl of great price.

Now, the pearl, there's none of this elaborate stuff about buying something else to get the pearl. The kingdom of God is just like a pearl, which a merchant found, and he sold all his other things to get it. I'm going to suggest something to you that cannot be proven, and therefore I could be wrong, but you just weigh this and see how it sounds.

I'm going to suggest that the first of these parables talks about how much the kingdom was worth to Christ. He saw the kingdom like a treasure in a field. He was willing to give up all that he had in order to obtain that field and have that treasure.

Thus, we learn how much to him the kingdom was valued. But the next parable, therefore, is the upshot of that. If the kingdom is so valuable to him, if he was willing to pay so much for it, how much value should we place upon it? How much should we be willing to pay, as it were, in order to have it? And I'm going to suggest, and you can just reject this if it doesn't make sense to you, that the first parable tells us about Jesus paying all that he had to obtain the church, the kingdom.

And the second parable talks about us forsaking all that we have in order to be a part of that kingdom. To us it is a pearl of great price, and we must sell all that we have to obtain it. Now, when I say sell all that we have, of course we're talking in terms of the parable.

The Bible doesn't really teach that all people need to literally sell everything they own to obtain the kingdom. Although that may indeed be true of some, and we know that the rich young ruler was told to do just that. There are some people that may need to literally sell all that they have in order to be saved and to follow Christ.

But it's not automatic that when a person is called to follow Christ that they always have to sell all that they have. But what is automatic is that Jesus said in Luke 14, 33, Unless you forsake all that you have, you cannot be my disciple. And what he means by that, I believe, is that when you come to Christ, everything that you own is signed over to him.

You forsake ownership of it. It becomes his now. You pay, as it were, all things.

Because, you see, the Bible says you have been bought with a price. In 1 Corinthians 6, you are not your own. You've been bought with a price.

You've been bought by the blood of Jesus. And that being so, if you are going to walk in that reality and embrace that and appropriate that salvation, then you need to surrender yourself and all to him who purchased you. And it's not a matter of earning or buying your salvation by giving up what you have.

No, that's not how we're saved. We're saved by faith. But it's a matter of committal of all that we have to God.

Everything has to be turned over. Every part of our life, every position we have, every relationship, every ambition. God becomes the owner.

God becomes the ruler of everything in our life. If we have truly made the transaction that makes us disciples. And only disciples in Scripture are represented as those who are followers of Christ and saved.

If you believe in him, you follow him. But that's not without cost. He pays the price for your redemption.

In some ways, you pay the price of following him. Because you cannot follow him with all your stuff. You cannot have the Pearl of Great Price and all your other pearls too.

Too many of the things you own are in conflict with Christ. You can't serve two masters. If you're going to serve Jesus Christ, you're going to have to surrender your claim to all other things.

Now, that doesn't mean that Jesus will not allow you to hold on to and manage some of those things for him. The possessions you own, when you come to Christ, they cease to be your own. And you then must dispense with them as he wishes.

If he says, we'll sell them and give them to the poor, then that's fine. You do so. If he says, well, use this for me, then that's what you do instead.

Just as Peter, for example, who is said to have forsaken all that he had to follow Jesus, yet he owned a house and he owned a boat, and yet he used these things in the service of Jesus. Peter's house became the headquarters for Jesus' ministry in Capernaum. And Peter's boat became Jesus' primary transport whenever he crossed the Sea of Galilee, which was frequently.

So that although the scripture says that Peter forsook all that he had, yet that doesn't mean he sold it all or had a flea market and sold all his possessions at a yard sale. What it means, of course, is that all that he had was surrendered to Jesus. Jesus became the owner.

Peter became the steward. And that's what the Bible teaches is really the universal thing about discipleship. You come to Jesus not holding on to what's yours and just getting a ticket to heaven out of the deal.

You come surrendering your whole life to him just as a woman does to a husband on her wedding. She surrenders even her own name in order to be identified with him. And what she had is his.

And he is her head. That's what the Bible says it's like with us in Christ. That is how Jesus represents discipleship.

That is how the kingdom of God is to be viewed. It was of such surpassing value that Jesus gave all that he had to obtain it. And the disciple needs to be prepared when called upon to do so to give up all that he has in order to obtain it as well.

Again, even if we give up all that we have, we cannot possibly have purchased our salvation. It's more than we could afford. That is purchased for us as a gift.

But the conditions of coming into that salvation are that we are totally devoted to God. And that includes not only everything we are, but everything we have. Like the merchant who sells all that he has to obtain that pearl of great price.

I hope you've made that transaction. If not, let me urge you to do so today.