

A Prize Is Waiting For You!

Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52

It is a true story - no matter how much like a fairy tale it may sound. A totally unsuspecting man literally stumbled upon the world's largest diamond - all 3,106 carats of it. It happened in Premier Mine #2, near Pretoria, South Africa, in early 1905. This amazing stone was then sent in an ordinary cardboard box to England. One hundred and five stones were cut from this diamond, known as the Cullinan diamond. Two of the largest stones which it produced, the 530-carat Star of Africa and the 317-carat Cullinan II, are part of the British crown jewels.

Nowadays people dream of winning the Publishers Clearing House. Or, in some states, the lottery. But in Jesus' time people dreamed of finding treasure buried in a field or at least discovering a precious stone lying in the road. Commerce and banking were not as sophisticated as they are today. There were no offshore banks in the grand Caymans; no unnumbered accounts in Switzerland. So people who wanted to secure their wealth buried it in the ground. It gained no interest, but at least it was secure. Unfortunately, some of these people died before reclaiming their wealth. So there it lay just waiting for someone to discover it.

Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is like that. It is like treasure hidden in a field which someone stumbled upon. In order to secure his new found wealth, the lucky finder hid the treasure all over again in that same field. Then joyfully he took everything he had and sold it to buy the field. Then the treasure was his. And as if to emphasize his point Jesus added, ***"The Kingdom is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. In his search, he finds one of unsurpassed value. So he too sells everything he has to purchase that pearl."*** This is what the kingdom of God is like" ***buried treasure***" like a pearl of great price

I. JESUS DESCRIBES THIS TREASURE IS JUST WAITING TO BE DISCOVERED.

The kingdom of God is not something we enter someday when we die. It is not even something we have to strive for. The kingdom of God is here and now. It is a present reality just waiting for us to stumble upon.

In west Texas, there is a famous oil field known as the Yates Pool. During the depression, this field was a sheep ranch owned by a man named Yates. Yates was not able to make enough money on his ranching operation to pay the principal and interest on his mortgage, so he was in danger of losing his ranch. With little money for clothes or food, his family, like many others, had to live on a government subsidy. Day after day, as he grazed his sheep over those rolling west Texas hills, he was no doubt greatly troubled about how he would be able to pay his bills.

Then a crew from an oil company came into the area and told Mr. Yates that there might be oil on his land. They asked permission to drill a wildcat well, and he signed a lease. At a little more than a thousand feet, they struck a huge oil reserve, giving eighty thousand barrels a day. In fact, thirty years after the discovery, a government test of one of Mr. Yates' wells showed that it could still produce more than a hundred thousand barrels of oil a day.

And Mr. Yates owned it all. The day he had purchased the land, he received the oil and mineral rights. And yet, he had been living on relief - a multimillionaire living in poverty. What had been the problem? He did not know the oil was there. He owned it, but he did not possess it.

Jesus says to us that the Kingdom of God is something like that. You and I already have it within our grasp. It is there waiting to be discovered. But many of us are living impoverished lives, not realizing that the Kingdom is ours if we want it.

II. THIS TREASURE BRINGS THE FINDER GREAT JOY.

How would you feel if Ed McMahon knocked on your door? Then you know how it would feel to receive the Kingdom into your life.

When Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of heaven (the two terms are interchangeable), he was talking about the reign of God in human hearts. The natural inclination of the person in whose life God reigns is joy.

Now you and I have met people who claim to have been born again, who claim to have experienced God's grace in their lives, who will tell you they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, but they are angry and bitter and lacking in both compassion and love. It is not ours to judge, but one has to wonder if they have confused a particular

kind of emotional experience with the surrender of one's life to God. Where God is, there is light. Where God is, there is love. Where God is, there is joy.

Now here again, we must be careful. There are people today, celebrities in many fields, who are heralding a Kingdom without the King. A religion without God. A spirituality without the Holy Spirit. I am talking about so-called New Age religion.

The next time you hear someone talk about being spiritual, ask them if they are talking about living under the rule of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And we could add, the God of Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel. Ask them if they are talking about the God who said, ***"Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not commit adultery"***. Ask them if they are talking about the God who became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Ask them if it is the God who says, ***"You shall love Me with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."*** Because only when THAT God reigns in our lives is there true happiness.

There are some very unhappy people in our society who claim to have found a power within, a spiritual power or a source of peace, but if you get closer, you discover that they are not talking about God at all -- at least not the God we know. The truth is that where God does not reign, there can be no lasting joy.

For you see, **this Kingdom is a package deal**. It is a life of trust,

- Believing that the Creator of this world loves each of us
- Believing that this Creator has given us a pattern for living that leads to harmony with one another and with the One who is the Source of Life.
- Believing that because of what Jesus Christ has done for us that our lives have eternal significance.
- Believing that through the power of the Holy Spirit, we have access to God here and now.

Do you believe that? Do you believe further that because God is with us, nothing can defeat or destroy us? Do you believe any of that? Do you believe ALL of that? Then you have joy that the world cannot take away. The treasure of the Kingdom is available here and now, just waiting to be discovered. Appropriating that treasure brings us great joy.

III. THIS KINGDOM CAN ONLY BE OURS IF WE ARE WILLING TO GIVE EVERYTHING WE HAVE TO PURCHASE IT.

This is not legalism. It is not a denial of grace. It is a simple fact. The Kingdom cannot bring us joy if we seek to only purchase part of it or to purchase it on the “lay away” plan. Again, it is a package deal. You will not find joy if you hold part of your life back from God's reign. God must rule in every part. A person cannot be truly happy if he or she makes only a partial commitment.

This is one reason so many married couples don't make it nowadays. One member didn't make a complete commitment. And this is the reason there are so many unhappy Christians: They never did lay all they are, all they hope to be, on the altar of God.

Remember how Jesus said in Matthew 6:21 that where a person's treasure is, there is his heart. You may think Jesus cared about money when he said that. He didn't. He cared about bringing people into the Kingdom. He knew that where we make an investment, we have a commitment.

Conversely, where we have no investment, we have no commitment. God asks each of us to make an investment of our lives and our possessions. God asks us to take everything we are, everything we own, everything we hope to own and lay it on the altar of faith. If we acknowledge that it all belongs to God, including the very life that courses through our bodies, then, in exchange for that level of commitment, God gives us a treasure greater than the Cullinan diamond, greater than the Yates oil field. It is a gift that money can't buy. It is the gift of unbeatable joy. And it is waiting for any who would receive it.

In his book “The Compassionate Christ”, Dale Oldham compared the attitude that many people have about the Kingdom to a yapping dog that resided in his neighborhood. The dog was always chasing a cat that lived next door. Whenever he saw the cat, he would go after it as if it were his only aim in living. So long as the cat ran, everything was lovely. But occasionally the cat would stop suddenly and face the dog. Then the dog would put on the brakes and act as if the whole thing were only a joke. Evidently the cat was to be chased but not to be caught, and if the cat insisted on being caught, then the dog was most embarrassed.

"Too often," says Dale Oldham, "we have pursued the Kingdom of God in this same spirit. We have cried out in a burst of enthusiasm so long as we have been pursuing the Kingdom, but most of us would be greatly embarrassed if we were actually to catch up with the Kingdom."

Jesus says you don't have to chase the Kingdom. It's already here. It's already available. We have already won the prize - all we have to do is claim it. All we have to do is let God reign in our hearts without reservation. If we do that, we will discover a joy that the world cannot know or steal.