

The Cross Marks The Spot

Pastor Matthew Ude

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2 Corinthians 4:5-7 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

I was speaking to the children concerning pirates and their treasure. One of the pirates I mentioned was Captain William Kidd who was given a commission to hunt down pirates in the India Ocean. Even though he was leaving to sail on a long journey around the tip of Africa and into the India Ocean, he had no problem finding men who were willing to sail with him. This was because of the promise of the treasure which they thought they would find.

Paul reminds us that we have been given a far greater treasure. One which we did not have to sail to Madagascar to find. The word by which all things were created. The glory which was seen on the mount of transfiguration. The grace of Jesus Christ who suffered for our sins. This treasure is marked not with an X but with a cross.

The bible is full of examples of men and women who understood the true worth of this gift, and earnestly desired both to gain it and to share it.

So great was this treasure to them that they could not keep silent. No one had to tell the wise men to travel across sand and nations. They gladly went to see for themselves their savior. No one had to tell the shepherds to share the news. Overcome with astonishment that they had seen the Christ they could not help but speak about him to everyone they met. We too ought to understand the value of the treasure which we find at the cross, so that we cannot help but speak of those things we have heard and seen.

Today we take a look at some examples of biblical pirates, treasure hunters, who delighted in the gift of the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Our first example is a man named Joses, whom you may know under the name Barnabas. Barnabas is living example of Jesus' parable concerning the treasure hidden in the field.

Acts 4:36-37 And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

The first thing we learn about Barnabas is that he sold his land and gave the money to the church.

You'll notice that it does not say house but land. The Greek word here is "agros" the word from which we get agriculture. It means a cultivated field, or land in the country as opposed to land in the city. Barnabas sells his source of livelihood to dedicate himself fully to the work of the ministry.

In doing so Barnabas is not only a living example of Jesus' parable but he was also fulfilling his birthright as a Levite. You may remember how when Israel conquered the land of Canaan and it was divided amongst the tribe, no land was given to the tribe of Levi. Instead, the Lord said to that tribe, I will be your portion your inheritance.

Psalms 16:5 O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot.

Certainly, we need more people who like Barnabas so highly value this treasure that they willingly lay aside the wealth of this earth to serve the Lord with all their hearts. As Jesus reminds us we need to pray for our pastors, teachers and missionaries that they may be whole hearted in his service. We also want to pray that many more would follow the example of Barnabas. Lay aside the service of this world and give themselves to the service of the Lord.

Nevertheless, it is not to all the tribes of Israel that the Lord gave this high calling. Neither is it to all the church that the Lord asks them to sell their fields. But for those who are not called into the public ministry Barnabas is still an example of seeking the treasure of the cross.

For all can follow him in exemplifying encouragement. There are those who seem to think that criticism, rumors, slanders and disparagement is the way to protect God's word and God's church. The attitude is this that my way is right and if I stop anyone who does things differently than our way will be a good church.

Yet the church of God and the word of God are never served by such means. Rather we ought to follow the example of Barnabas and encourage one another.

Ephesians 4:15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head-- Christ--

Romans 14:19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

1 Corinthians 10:23 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.

Therefore, be quick to encourage your ministers, teachers and one another in all things. Speak well of them and not disdainfully. Pray for them always. In so doing more than by any other means, even

more than your offerings, you will work together towards the goal of the treasure that we have at the cross.

Our second biblical treasure hunter is Mary, the sister of Martha and brother of Lazarus. Here was a woman who neglected her duties in order to receive more of this treasure. Jesus does not rebuke her for her choice but instead praises her and gives to her a very important promise.

Luke 10:41-42 And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

You may remember how Martha was busy cooking and cleaning and thought that Mary ought to help her instead of listening to Jesus. Jesus makes it clear however that if Martha had understood the value of the treasure that Mary was receiving than Martha too would have left the dishes and come to receive the word of God.

Jesus does not praise Mary because she isn't doing the dishes but because she has her priorities straight.

Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God." He didn't say don't do the dishes, he just said make sure you put God's kingdom first.

It is so easy for us to get sidetracked, there are so many things and so many ways to look as though we are working hard but actually, we are accomplishing nothing, or at least failing to get done what is important.

In the ministry I could spend hours making the perfect bulletin cover. Writing out schedules. Thinking up clever themes and parts. It is easy to get distracted with things that are to some extent a part of my duties, but which are not the main responsibility.

When it comes to sharing our faith, it is easy to get distracted by discussing politics, marriage, or evolution without ever getting to the real treasure. These things are important, but they are not the real treasure that we have to share. The real treasure is this that Jesus died for our sins and grants us eternal life.

How often do we like Martha get caught up in the things of this world, forgetting what our real treasure is. The dishes are always there and no matter how often you clean them, they will not stay clean. God however promises us a treasure which will never be taken from us.

Last but certainly not least, we have Naaman. Naaman who almost missed out on the grace of God not because it was too hard, but because he considered it beneath his dignity.

2 Kings 5:11-14 But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.' Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

How often do we despise the grace of God because we think church is boring or catechism class dull? How often do we fail to value a thing because it is given freely, or because the world does not value it? How many people despise the gift of God not because it is hard to attain but because it is freely given.

How many AOL disks sit in landfills? Is God's word just another example of junk mail? To many the answer is yes. Naaman thought so at first, but then he put God's promises to the test and found those promise to be worth more than gold.

Romans 2:4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

1 Corinthians 1:23-24 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

This treasure is given to you freely, not because it is without value but because of the grace of God. The prophet reminds us not to despise the day of small things. This treasure, though it may often be wrapped in common paper, is a treasure greater than the riches of the world. For in this treasure, you who were dead in your sins have been granted salvation through the death of your Savior.

These are some of the treasure hunters of scripture. Some sought out the treasure of God and some found it by accident. All of them delighted in the riches of God's grace in Christ Jesus, and none of them ever regretted or repented of giving their lives to this treasure. For them this treasure was not a thing to hide or hoard but a thing to boldly share.

Neil Gaiman tells the story of a star that fell to earth. At first, she was miserable and in pain, but as she found love and happiness she began to glow as a star ought.

The treasure which God has given to these people caused them to glow with the joy of his grace. Just as Moses returned from the mountains shining with the reflected glory of God, so also these men and woman shone with the treasure of the cross. Indeed, their lives still glow with the joy they received. They found a treasure of great value which they still have, which is found not at the x but at the cross. Amen