

The Cost is Christ's, The Value is Yours

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Matthew 13:44-52 ⁴⁴ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like 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. ⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶ "who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. ⁴⁷ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, ⁴⁸ "which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ "So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰ "and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth." ⁵¹ Jesus said to them¹, "Have you understood all these things?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord²." ⁵² Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning¹ the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure *things* new and old."

Jesus does not speak about cost but about value.

Cost and value are two very different things. A gift may cost you nothing but might still be incredibly valuable. On the other hand, if you are at a sports game and want to buy a beer the cost might be far more than its actual value.

Cost and value are not the same, yet we sometimes confuse the two. We assume that because something costs more it must be worth more.

There is a story about a pastor who advertised free marriage counseling. No one was interested in the classes until he started charging for them. When they were free people evidently assume they were of little value.

This is a mistake that some make with these parables. They hear this parable and confuse cost and value. They think I must give up everything and live in a cave then I'll be part of the kingdom.

Jesus speaks to us about the value of the kingdom not its cost. He does not ask us to give up everything to gain the kingdom. He gives it to us free of price, but he does want us to understand the value of this gift. The value is far beyond anything we might have or possess on this earth.

When we give a gift, we usually take the price tag off. In these parable Jesus is putting the price tag back on. He wants us to know what the kingdom is worth not because we have to pay that price but so that we will understand its value and treasure it.

The parables bear this out. The farmer does not pay the value of the treasure, he only pays for the field. If he had to pay the actual value of the treasure, he would never be able to own it.

Similarly, it might be assumed that the merchant did not pay the value of the pearl. Being a pearl merchant, he knew its true value and was willing to sell everything else because he knew the value of the pearl to be far greater than the cost.

The cost of the kingdom for us is nothing. It is freely given to us by his grace. For him the cost of us being a part of that kingdom was everything, even his very life. The value of what he has given to us is beyond understanding.

Romans 5:15 ¹⁵ **But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.**

What is the kingdom? What is this free gift which Christ has given to us?

The term the kingdom is steeped in the history of Israel. God chose his people and made them a nation. He led them out of Egypt. He was their king and lived among them. He raised up David. He promised a king would come who would rule forever. All of this is what made them his kingdom, all that he did for them.

When the promised king comes, he rules. That ruling activity is God's kingdom. All that Jesus does to make us his people. All that he does with his power to rule over us.

The term the kingdom of heaven is a general term that encompasses all that Christ has done for us and has given to us. The kingdom is defined as Christ's ruling activity or Christ's power at work. In a simple sense it is everything that has to do with our salvation.

When Jesus says, "the kingdom of heaven is like. . ." It is similar to someone saying, "the work of a farmer is like . . ." You could talk about planting, watering, harvesting, enjoying the fruits of your labor. All are different aspect of the work of a farmer.

So Jesus speaks of many different things: the preaching of his word, his sacraments, the day of judgement, the gift of salvation, the gathering of all believers that we call the church.

Many different things but at the heart all of them are his power at work in our hearts, in the world, to bring us his people to heaven.

Romans 14:17 ¹⁷ **for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.**

In the first two parables before us today Jesus is speaking of all of it. It is all one packaged deal, and he is calling on us to value it, to treasure all of it. Treasure the work he did of dying for our sins. Treasure the preaching of his word which brings us the forgiveness of sins. Treasure coming together to sing hymns. Treasure the day of his coming so that with John we always respond, "Yes, Lord come quickly." Treasure being a part of it.

This is the point of these parables. Not that we must sell everything we have to gain the kingdom but only that what we have freely been given by Christ is of far greater value than anything we own.

Paul says in **Phi 3:7**, **“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.”** Not that he did give up all earthly possessions but that he counted them as lost, perfectly willing to give them up if it was helpful for the preaching of the gospel. Just as he willingly gave up his freedom when there was a chance to preach the gospel to the emperor at Rome.

Jesus knows that we tend to despise, that is to think little of, that which we have been freely given. He would teach us to value the priceless gift that is ours through his death.

Balaam is an example of someone who threw away God’s gifts.

Balaam was a prophet of the Lord. He was asked by Balak the king of Moab to come and curse the Israelites the people of God. Balak promised him much wealth, and so for the sake of wealth Balaam came. He could not curse the people of Israel, but he counseled Balak to seduce them and cause them to sin with idolatry and adultery. Balaam had the treasures of heaven freely give to him, but he threw it away for the sake of the treasures of this life.

God asked no price from Balaam for the salvation that he gave to him. When Balaam had a chance to gain earthly riches he sold the freely given gift of God for earthly money. Concerning Balaam and others Peter warns:

2 Peter 2:15-19 ¹⁵ **They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness . . . when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped¹ from those who live in error. ¹⁹ While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.**

Another example is Esau.

Esau sold his birthright which included the promise of the Messiah for a bowl of stew. Not like Balaam to gain earthly wealth but only to satisfy a momentary desire. How often are we tempted to throw away the free gifts of God just to satisfy the desire of the moment? In such a way we despise the gifts of God and treat them as useless.

These parables challenge us to appreciate the value of what Christ has freely given us. They are also a paradigm for the cost Christ paid. Christ is the merchant who found us and gave up everything to make us his own. He is the farmer who found us and sold all that he might pay for us. He gave us heaven and his own life to pay the price to make us a part of his kingdom. In the farmer and the merchant we see an example of Christ.

The cost of the kingdom was paid by Christ, but the value of the kingdom is ours. Remember that and ponder it in your heart lest you throw away these riches like Balaam or Esau. Amen