

**Valley View Chapel**  
**October 13, 2013**  
**"A Story About Treasure"**  
**Matthew 13:44-46**

I could fill a bag with trinkets and treasures that are important to me. Things like race medals from high school cross country, autographed baseballs, the antlers from my first buck, a family photo.

If I sent you home with a bag, you'd probably come up with some treasures like these. Maybe some would put in the first love note from their spouse, or a trophy from that big season, or the keys to your beloved car, house, or boat; or maybe the symbol of something you still feel pain from but it represents what was a treasure- a family member's ashes, or the wedding picture of your deceased parents, a birth certificate, or adoption papers.

Some things would be stuff we are fond of, or that brings back great memories, some would be stuff we really treasure.

A treasure can be anything you can't live without, or you wouldn't <i>want</i> to live without.
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JD Greear (pastor, author of *Gospel*) writes, "What do you really feel like has to be present in your life for you to be happy? For life to be worth living? Money? Acclaim of others? Power? Family, friends, church? God? Is His presence the one indispensable thing you could not live without?" (*Gospel* 69)

And to see if we treasure something besides Him, he offers an "Idolatry-Detector Test"<sup>(71-72)</sup> which we will rename "Treasure Detector Test" for this morning's purposes.

- What do you most hope is in your future?
- What do you most worry about losing?
- What have you sacrificed the most for?
- When do you feel the most significant?
- Whom do you feel like you can't forgive (because they probably took away something you treasured)?
- Where do you turn for comfort?

We may be seeking God, but we may be seeking other things with just as much passion. We may even be seeking Him to give us those other things, which, if we're honest, we value more than Him. Greear calls this "praying like adulterers"<sup>(75)</sup> and "making God our pimp"<sup>(76)</sup> by trying to use our relationship with God to chase after others loves, asking Him for the gifts He owns and ignoring Him, the giver.

Here are some things I know about treasure. Let's call them "**Treasure Truths**":

**1. Treasure can be very easily lost, or never gotten to begin with!**

If we were honest, we'd have to admit that what we treasure could very easily be taken away, or never there in the first place.

That is, we may have worked super hard, or saved long enough, or sacrificed so much but really that treasure wouldn't be ours if things *beyond our control* hadn't also come together. E.g.:

- You managed to *live* to acquire and enjoy that treasure. You weren't incapacitated or killed before you got it.
- Your banks or business or money jar didn't fail, crash, or burn up, so you still had all that saved money when you needed it.

- She said "yes," or he finally asked you!
- You were able to get pregnant and deliver a healthy baby.
- For me, not enough faster runners showed up that day; that buck just happened to come by my tree stand; the Mets took pity on a little boy and his bad dog; God gave us children when I know He could just as easily take away.

This treasure- "*MY*" treasure- it's like it's not totally mine after all...

Maybe that's what makes it a 'treasure'- it survived or lasted this long; despite all the odds against it, here it is still, in our little bag!

## 2. And so treasures have a way of making us extremely happy... and extremely anxious.

Because these things are worth so much to us, and because we realize we could lose them even easier than we gained them, we go to extreme measures to protect and insure them:

- Big insurance policies + riders
- bank deposit boxes or bomb-proof safes
- tall fences and security cameras
- passwords & PINs.

Sometimes it may be unclear which is greater: our love for our treasures, or our fear of losing them!

## 3. Everyone treasures something and usually wants more.

That's why people have told "treasure tales" for millennia. Pirates, gold misers, princes lost at sea, natural disasters and more are all rumored to have buried treasures all over this planet.

In 2009 or 2010, decorated Vietnam war pilot, writer, and art dealer Forrest Fenn claims to have hidden a small bronze chest filled with gold coins, jewelry, and ancient artifacts valued at \$1-3 million somewhere in the Rocky Mtns north of Santa Fe, NM! He put clues to the treasure's location in his memoir, *The Thrill of the Chase* (2010) and published a new book last month called *Too Far To Walk*, which has a pullout map of the treasure's resting place. After almost dying from cancer, Fenn thought he could leave a legacy by inviting anyone with a thrill for discovery like his to blaze a new trail in search of his hidden treasure. And it has yet to be found... (*tickets to NM on Frontier Airlines are only \$221 now ☺*)

Treasure tales- real and fictional- have abounded. In Bible times, it was no different. Legends and tales circulated about finding hidden treasure + striking it rich.

Jesus knew about these treasure tales and so to illustrate a point, he made up one of His own. Today we'll explore the shortest parables Jesus told. Yet they're about something that is so huge to us: treasure!

### -Matt 13:44-

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."<sup>NIV</sup>

In Matthew 13, Jesus repeatedly uses parables to describe the "kingdom of heaven." But what is that?!

- "*kingdom*"<sup>(Zondervan Bible Dictionary)</sup> can mean:
  - 1) the realm over which a king rules; *territory*
  - 2) the people over whom he reigns; *subjects*
  - 3) the rule/reign itself. *Authority and position of the ruler*

We don't use the last meaning very often anymore, but that was its primary meaning at Jesus' time.

### The "kingdom of heaven" IS...

The rule of God over people and creation in such a way that God's spiritual enemies are suppressed or destroyed and the people in His kingdom are blessed by His reign.

It IS NOT... (like any other kingdom)

The Jews anticipated and hoped for a political kingdom that their Messiah would usher in, crushing their enemies and establishing Jewish power- even world domination- once again.

Maybe you watched the cartoon *Pinky & The Brain* as a kid. Every episode about these 2 zany lab mice began this way, with Pinky asking Brain, "Gee Brain, what do you want to do tonight?" Brain always responded, "The same thing we do every night, Pinky: try to take over the world!"

Now, the Jews wanted a literal kingdom, with a powerful King, wealth, military might, land and borders... But they and we should know that kingdom's don't last forever. Earthly kingdoms rise and fall.

So Jesus taught about a new and different kingdom, one prophesied about in the OT, and the one He came to bring. It would be a reign by a King- THE KING- and it would have subjects and even enemies, but no borders and flags. And yet it would accomplish complete domination one day without any military or swords. This kingdom where Jesus is the King is one established in the hearts of people. Jesus is the kingdom and He desires to bring His kingdom into our lives through His very presence.

The Jewish religious expert Nicodemus once asked Jesus how he could get into this kingdom. *Jesus replied, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again" (Jn 3:3); 'not re-born physically, but spiritually, by God's Spirit' (3:5)...*

*<sup>16</sup> For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world (not as a warrior king trampling over God's enemies, which is everyone acc. to Col 1:21- "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior."!),*

*...but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*

See, you don't "get into" this kingdom; God's kingdom "gets into" you! We don't merely salute another king; we are adopted into the King's family as His children!!

God intends to draw you into His kingdom not by force, but by love and invitation- invitation to be forgiven + saved from punishment for your sin, and to begin a new life that's full of His presence to guide + provide for you forever!

Now back to our story. Here's two things you should know:

- **"Field"**- most of the farm land then was controlled by wealthy landowners who hired servants or bought slaves to work it.
- **Treasure was often buried** because no formal banks existed. In ancient times, it would be quite possible for a wealthy man to meet an untimely death and leave his treasure buried somewhere in the ground, for a later discoverer to enjoy. You see this in Scripture (*Achan stole from Ai plunder + buried it; parable of talents- 1 talent man hid it in ground*)

This guy is working in a field like every other day, but he digs up something more valuable than he could ever imagine. He never saw it coming! And to make sure it's his for good, he doesn't just steal it; he buys the rights to it.

If you lived in Texas, you would know about "mineral rights." That is, you could own your house and property, but someone else could own whatever was in the ground: oil, gold, etc. If you struck oil, you wouldn't profit from it!

...But this guy bought the land + mineral rights!

Maybe he went to work that day to work towards a big savings account, or retirement, or probably just food for his table. He went to the field to work for what he treasured, but that day the field changed from being a means to a treasure, to holding treasure itself!

At least admit that you may also be surprised by what you treasure one day, and that there may be a treasure out there that you would find more valuable than your treasure now.

Before he finds this treasure in the field, if we were to give this man a sack and told him to put his most treasured items in it, he would, just like you and me. It's doubtful he'd have keys to his summer home or speedboat, or even a checking account #, but if there's anything I know about people, it's that we always find something to treasure... So he'd come up with some things, I'm sure! But what wouldn't be in his bag? That treasure or even the certificate of ownership to the field. He was totally caught off guard by this treasure!

Maybe the last thing you expected today was to come across a treasure that put yours to shame, but I'd like to suggest it's possible. I promise you there's a better treasure than the one you could fit in your bag.

Treasure is only as valuable as your vantage point allows you to see.

You think you know what's best, most valuable, and worth living for now. But test yourself: Have you always treasured what you treasure today? When you were 4 did you stay awake at night thinking about a promotion or vacation home? (*You wanted to be an astronaut or dolphin trainer.*)

Did anybody else collect baseball cards like me? Now they're all basically worthless, both to the market and to me, these things which I treasured so much at one point.

I bet your treasures have also changed as your life has.

Sickness, tragedy, life stages, and more have all changed many a person's treasure.

We think that the treasures we want or have today will give us happiness in the future, that they will still be treasures after a while, but that's just not true! Our treasures can be as fickle as the circumstances of our life.

Even today you may discover they aren't worth nearly what you thought they were, or you may discover something that far exceeds their value.

Jesus tells another treasure story about that.

**Matt 13:45-46<sup>NIV</sup>**

45“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

I wonder what people would say to these guys if this happened (they traded everything for a gold box or big pearl):

*"How are you going to live?!"*

*"C'mon, is it really worth that much?!"*

*"It's only worth what someone will pay for it!"*

Imagine the conversation the first guy had with the landowner, who may have asked, "Why do you want my field? Think of all the responsibility it will take to manage it! You can't afford to buy the field and pay workers to use it. What's your plan after today's big purchase? What about your family? What about your job? Aren't you being reckless?!"

But these men had found something that blinded them to anything but the treasure before them.

In the first case, the treasure found the man.

In the second case, the man found the treasure.

Some of you are like the pearl merchant.

You've been collecting little pearls, little treasures all along, but you're still looking for the ultimate satisfaction, be it truth, fulfillment, forgiveness, purpose, or a high or thrill, or something to make sense of this life, even... God. You have some things you care about but you haven't found "*the treasure*" your heart longs for... whatever that may be. You're searching...

Some of you are like the first man.

You think you have your treasure or at least know what it is you want. But are you willing to be surprised by another treasure?

People may question what you treasure with, "*It's only worth what someone will pay for it!*" I agree; that's a good question.

So if the treasure- the "kingdom of heaven"- this knowing God in a personal relationship because you're forgiven and freed from the penalty of your sin- if this is the treasure, then what did God pay for it?

God would reply, "I paid the highest price: My Son, myself!"

- **Isa 53: 3** *[Jesus] was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. 4 Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! 5 But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. 6 All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all.*
- **2 Cor 5:21** *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

God paid the highest price you could never pay to give us the most valuable treasure: Himself. And in Him is permanent love, acceptance, forgiveness, and life as it was meant to be. His treasure, His kingdom goes on + on, never stopping, never failing, always enough.

- **Rom 8:32** *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

"But is Jesus worth more than my treasure now?"

I can't convince you of that. Ultimately it's a step of faith, trusting in Jesus with your life and making Him your treasure. But I can tell you about some others who found Him worth it- well worth it. And it's not because He seemed to make their lives any easier or better. On the contrary.

**Hudson Taylor** (*pioneering missionary to inland China in 1850s*) lived in willful poverty to prepare for the mission field and to give to those who had less. He gave away over 2/3 of his income to the poor among whom he preached Jesus. He wrote in his journal about going to church and then visiting the slums of the poorest part of town to visit and pray for people...<sup>(33)</sup> It was on those visits that "*it almost seemed to me as if heaven were begun below, and that all that could be looked for was an enlargement of one's capacity for joy, not a truer filling than I possessed.*"

"*I never made a sacrifice*" he said later in life. The more it seemed that he lost worldly treasure, the more he gained the treasure of God's kingdom.

**Jim Elliot** was a young missionary who was killed by the Auca Indians of Ecuador in 1956 at age 29. Before his death, he wrote in his journal: "*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.*"

Is God worth it? Can He really be a better treasure than anything you have or could find later? I know He is. Listen to the extent of His love for you:

- **Rom 8: 35** *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ...37*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38***For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39*neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

John Piper has written, "We need to ponder the superiority of God as our great reward over all that the world has to offer. If we don't, we will love the world like everyone else and live like everyone else," chasing our never-satisfying treasures like a dog after its tail.

Money, sex, power, popularity, achievement, children, houses, toys, drugs, clothes, vacations, food, fitness aren't satisfying enough treasures. You'll *always* have more to get. Happiness will seem that much further away.

You know your track record of treasuring things and having your treasure change. So the treasure you're pursuing so hard now, is it going to satisfy you tomorrow? In 5, 10, 30 years?

How long do you want to be searching for treasure?

I can promise that your heart will never stop seeking treasure, so you need a new heart! And you need a different kind of treasure; one that never fades, spoils, is stolen or outdated that becomes more and more satisfying as you grow.

In Jesus, this is the treasure you inherit directly from God:

- I am God's child.
- I am a beloved friend of Jesus Christ.
- I am innocent, not guilty in God's sight. (justified)
- I am the righteousness of God.
- I have been bought with a price and I belong to God.
- I have been chosen by God and adopted as His child.
- I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins.
- I am complete in Christ.
- I have direct access to the throne of grace through Jesus Christ.
- I am free from condemnation.
- I am assured that God works for my good in all circumstances.
- I cannot be separated from the love of God.
- I am a citizen of heaven.
- I have not been given a spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind.
- I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me.
- I have been chosen and empowered to do good things.
- I am God's dwelling place.
- I am seated with Jesus Christ in the heavenly realm.
- I am God's workmanship.
- I may approach God with freedom and confidence.
- I am dead to sin and alive to God.
- I inherit all that Jesus inherits as God's Son.
- I have everlasting life with God in a New Heaven + Earth.
- I have peace with God.
- I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.

- I am free.
- I am holy, without blemish, and free from accusation.
- I have the Hope of all hopes.
- I am accepted, secure, and significant. (*Neil Anderson's summary*)

...Isn't that the treasure you're really searching for?

...Isn't that the treasure that outshines any other?

When all is said and done, we will say 1 of 2 things:

Will we say with the Fortune 500 CEO, "I spent all my life climbing the ladder of success, only to find out it was leaning against the wrong building." (*Gospel 78*)

Or can we say with Paul (Php 3:7-8) "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord"

Some of you don't have Jesus, the pearl of greatest price, the surprising treasure of infinite worth, and the One who can save you from sin, hell, and even yourself. He is God's gift to you. Will you receive Him? Will you discover this Treasure today?

Some of you have Jesus, the treasure. But you're still searching for more, as if there is more. You've taken the idolatry test and detected some treasures that you realize aren't worth what you think they are. Will you rediscover this Treasure today? What do you do if you're at this place?

No sin, idol, or bad habit is ever defeated by direct combat against it. You won't love that thing less or do that thing less by trying to love it less or do it less.

Instead, look on Jesus. Spend more time with Him, in His Word. Memorize His thoughts, sing His praise, invest in His kingdom and people with your time, energy + treasure. And as you pour yourself into Him, you will feel as if He pours more of Himself into you, leaving less room for idols and lesser treasures. And you'll even find that the things you should value- family, lost + hurting people, your friends- matter more to you in a healthier way.

May Jesus be your treasure, for the first time, or once again today.