

PONDERING THE PARABLES_3

Continuing in our series entitled **"Pondering the Parables,"** let's take a look at some more Kingdom parables. As I said last week, these are usually identified by an introductory phrase such as: **"The kingdom of heaven is like..."** and these short stories are not descriptive of *"a place,"* so much as *"principles"* that exist within the hearts of kingdom people – those people who allow the King of heaven to reign and rule in their hearts. Matter of fact, Paul would remind Christians in Rome: **"The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit..." (14:17)** Pay close attention to two brief parables about **"The Treasured Kingdom."** They can be found in **Matthew 13:44-46,** which is on page 1519 in the pew Bibles.

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

In response to that question, I was once told that it's evidently a kingdom where people use unethical business practices. After all, what's with this *"Finders-Keepers"* philosophy? Didn't the treasure legally belong to the owner of the property? If not, shouldn't he have turned it in to the authorities so they could find the rightful owner? Even if he discovered oil or natural gas, should not he have told the owner so these valuable resources could be factored into the price of the land? And the guy who found the pearl – where did he find it? If he retrieved it from an oyster while deep sea diving, did he have a permit?

Now, perhaps those are some things to ponder, but if we make them the focus of our attention we miss the point of the parable. And what is that point? **The kingdom of heaven contains great treasures.** What are they? To be honest, there are too many to list. But we'll focus on what I believe to be the most valuable...

First, **how much is eternal life worth?** I mean what value would you place on being able to live forever? I know that life has been devalued by so many these days. Abortion, euthanasia, genocide, massacres, murders, and even suicides are so common place today, that it appears like there is little appreciation for the sanctity of life.

Too often it's not until our life or the life of a loved one is threatened by a tragedy or bleak diagnosis which forecasts an early demise that we recognize just how precious life is. As Solomon said in **Ecclesiastes 3:11** that our Creator **"has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end."** Though death is all around us, we want to live forever and that's what God wants too. Though the first part of **Romans 6:23** tells us that **"the wages of sin is death"** the rest of the verse says **"the God of God is eternal life."**

As we saw last week, the King of Heaven made provision for the sin debt to be paid. In His incredible mercy, He balanced the books, not by cooking them, but by crediting Jesus' righteousness to our account. His blood has justified us. Listen to John the apostle in **1st John 5:11-13**. **"And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹²He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."** Seems pretty plain, doesn't it?

Yet, it's vitally important to realize that eternal life is not just about existing forever. Any doctor worth his salt will stress that there are some things, that though they may not make you live longer, can go a long way to help make your life better. Few people want to live in constant pain and misery. Fewer still opt to be put on life support – especially if there is little to no hope of recovery. In a similar vein our Great Physician want us to know that eternal life in the kingdom of God is not just about quantity. It is also about quality of life. The depth of our life is of as much, if not more, importance than the length of it.

So, how much is an abundant life worth? What would you give for a life filled with peace and joy and love? What price tag would you place on a life free from worry and stress? I've heard people speak in terms of *"exchanging their very soul"* for certain things that they feel would make their life worth living. Notice however, I've said nothing about health and wealth. And in the only place we find this phrasing in scripture, neither does Jesus. In **John 10** He says in another parable...

⁷"I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" - or "live life more abundantly." ¹¹I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep...."
²⁷"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one."

The Good Shepherd is Jesus and He does promise protection and provision for those sheep who consistently abide in His presence. They enter in through Him into the kingdom, for He is the gate. They listen to His voice and they follow Him. So what's the kingdom of heaven worth to you? See, in the parable of the treasure and the pearl of great price, those who discovered them gave up everything they had to possess them. What would you give up for everlasting, abundant life with God? Apparently, the answer that most give is not much – or at least not much that is of any worth to them. Why would I say such a thing?

My experience is that many who “say” that they follow Jesus live in improper relationships, or embracing immoral lifestyles knowing full well that He doesn’t approve. Oh, some convince themselves that because they “love” one another and Jesus “loves” them and they’re not hurting anyone that it’s okay - but they’re obviously not “listening” to Him or they would know better. Many others greedily hold on to possessions, popularity, or power so tightly that they cannot follow Jesus. After all, He Himself warned in **Luke 14:23**: **“Any of you who does not give up everything he has, cannot be my disciple.”** In context He makes it clear that “everything” includes every-thing that we may value more than following Him.

The apostles understood that. They left their homes and families; their jobs and friends. Why? Though they didn’t totally get it, they believed that nothing they gave up was worth comparing to the treasure of the kingdom. James and John expected to sit on thrones. Peter also believed the treasures of the kingdom were worth that all he had. Once after a rich young ruler refused to give up what he had to inherit eternal life, Peter said to Jesus, **“We have left everything to follow you!”** (**Mark 10:28- 31**) Jesus replied, **“I tell you the truth, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields--and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”** Now, none of the apostles became wealthy land owners. All of them suffered hardship in life and most were brutally killed for the sake of the kingdom. The world would say they made a very poor investment. Yet, they saw the kingdom of God to be so valuable that losing everything on earth to get the kingdom was a happy trade-off.

Those who chose to follow Jesus wouldn’t turn loose of the kingdom of God even in exchange for their very lives. Paul would say in **Philippians 3:7-8** **“Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”** So what treasures did they receive? Everlasting life- and the perspective that comes with it that makes life really worth living.

If that’s not your experience, then I need to ask, *“Have you somehow missed it?”* Are you looking for everything else in life to fulfill you? Or are you seeking the kingdom of God? In **Mark 10:15**, Jesus said, **“I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”** Ever notice how once a child sets their heart on something, they’ll drop everything else to get it. And as Jesus also said in **Matthew 6:24** **“where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**