

The Most Valuable Thing

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[0 : 00] Now I want you to think for a moment about the most expensive thing you own. Think about that for a moment. The most expensive thing you own. It might be your new iPad, maybe your car, or your holiday home.

In other words, something you own and not the bank. Okay? Something you own. What is that? That's completely debt-free. What is that most expensive thing? Now you've got that in your mind, right? Now I want you to forget about it and think about what is the most valuable thing you own. Now Gary, you might be thinking, isn't that the same thing? Well, it might be. For example, I was thinking about it. My computer is probably the most expensive thing I own. But my wedding band is probably the most valuable thing I own.

It's not very expensive. You might pick it up for how much? 200 rand? I don't know. It's cheap. But it has great value to me. Not because my wife gave it to me, strangely enough.

Although that should be value enough. Close your ears. You didn't hear that part. But it belonged to my dad. And when he died, I inherited it. Therefore, it has great value.

[1 : 04] Significant, isn't it? Now think about that thing for a moment. Now I want you to imagine giving that away. The most valuable thing you own in order to get, here we go, this pencil.

It's a really nice pencil. It's a clutch pencil. If you press this, it comes out. It's really good. Would you part with your most valuable possession, your prized possession, for this awesome pencil?

Highly unlikely, isn't it? Unless we think that this pencil is worth more or more valuable than the most valuable thing you own. Then you'd have no problem parting with it, would you? So as we consider these parables, the first thing Jesus tells us is that the kingdom of God is worth more than everything you own.

It's worth more than everything you own. Have a look at verse 44 again. He says, That sounds like a scene out of Treasure Island.

Or if you're not a great reader, maybe out of Pirates of the Caribbean. Yeah, that's a guy's movie. Back in the day, it wasn't uncommon for people to hide valuables in the ground.

[2 : 16] In a country like Palestine, which was regularly ravaged by war, they didn't have banks and safes. So people hid their belongings in the ground. That's what they did. However, it seems that in centuries later, finding one of these treasures only happened once in about a thousand years.

Or at least that's what I'm told. So to find one of these treasures is a very rare thing. There were laws regarding the finding of things, like treasures in a field in the first century.

So the rabbis or rabbinical laws stated that if you found a treasure in a field, someone else's field, and you lifted it out of that field, then that treasure belonged to the owner of that field.

The only way you could own the treasure was if you owned the field. So what is a man to do if he's working in someone else's field and he finds a treasure?

Well, the first thing is you don't lift it out the field, right? You bury it again if you can. Nobody sees you. You buy the field so that you can get the treasure. Jesus says that the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven is like this.

[3 : 24] It is a valuable treasure that someone happens to find. I want you to notice that the person in the parable is not looking for treasure. He's not digging to find treasure.

He's just working in a field. He seems to be randomly digging and he just comes across the treasure. Maybe he's the gardener. Maybe he's just working for the owner of the field.

Whatever he is doing there doesn't actually matter. The point is he finds the treasure. He recognizes the value of this treasure. He then makes a plan to get the treasure by buying the field. And the cost of the field? Well, it costs him everything he owns. However, after giving up everything he owns to buy the field, he then gets the treasure and something that he thinks is of far greater

value.

Can you think of anything in this world that is worth that to you? Is there anything that you can think of that you would give up everything you own for? One thing.

[4 : 31] See, this man thinks that everything he owns is actually fair exchange. Fair exchange for the treasure. That is, fair price to pay for the kingdom of heaven. So from that first parable, we learn that the kingdom of heaven is worth more than the cost of discipleship.

As we consider the context, we would be tempted to think, oh, it seems to be that Jesus is here referring to the Gentiles. Because the Gentiles, remember it's a Jewish Gentile society, the Gentiles are living each day for themselves.

They have no idea about a promised Messiah for the most part. They are not waiting, are they, for the fulfillment of the promises that God has made to his people, the Israelites, through the Old Testament.

They are not searching for the Messiah. It's not what they are doing. They are like the guy in the field who is going about his daily business of, I don't know, digging in a field. And now, Jesus, the Messiah, has arrived.

And with him has arrived the kingdom of heaven. Suddenly, they are faced with a choice. Either they are to believe that this man, Jesus, is king of this kingdom, or he's not king of the kingdom.

[5 : 39] Either Jesus ushers in the kingdom, or he doesn't usher in the kingdom. Either the kingdom is valuable, or it's not valuable. It's a choice he has to make. Now, it could be that you have wandered in here today and are just visiting with us, not expecting anything fantastic.

But you're not really religious, and you thought, well, you might as well pop in because you're passing by, you heard the music, you saw people dressed up and looking all funny with clerical colors, so you thought, ah, I wonder what's going on there. Or maybe you were invited to this special occasion, because it is a special occasion in the life of St. Mark's Church.

Whatever the reason that you are here this morning, can I say this? How fortunate for you. How fortunate for you to be here. Because you are like the guy in the field who happens to stumble across the kingdom of heaven.

That's what's happened to you this morning. If you didn't know that, now you do, right? You have now stumbled across this great treasure called the kingdom of heaven. It is the most valuable thing you can find.

And you have a choice to make today. You can either choose to be part of this kingdom or not part of the kingdom. Now, that's what happened to me roughly about 24 years ago. I went on a Christian camp in university, which I was invited to by a girl.

[6 : 55] Now, to tell you the truth, the only reason I went was because of the girl. I thought it would get me into a good book. It was not my wife. Yeah.

And then I thought, who knows what could happen from there. Well, we never did end up dating. That is the girl and I. However, that weekend, out of the blue, when I wasn't looking for it, it wasn't why I was there, I heard about the kingdom of heaven.

We were studying the Old Testament, going through all the main events from Genesis through to Matthew. That's what we did. I learned in Genesis that there was a serpent crusher who would come and destroy the devil and set people free.

I learned that I was not perfect. Me? Not perfect? Contrary to my own belief, I thought I was great. And then I heard that I was a sinner. I learned that God wasn't happy with me for rejecting him. More importantly, I learned that I couldn't do anything to impress God. I couldn't do anything to make God love me or make God forgive me. because my works counted for nothing.

[8 : 03] Then I realized it leaves me with a problem. So if I want to get into heaven, how do I get my sin taken care of? How do I find forgiveness if I can't do it?

Fortunately, by the end of the weekend, I found that the story doesn't end in the book of Malachi, but in the end of the Old Testament, it doesn't stop there. I was taught as we opened the New Testament, I heard about Jesus, who was the perfect son of God.

I heard about Jesus who took the punishment for my sin by dying on a cross so that I could have my sin forgiven. He died so that I could be part of this kingdom of heaven and spend eternity with him, which we just celebrated at Easter.

I learned that this, the kingdom of heaven, the gift of the kingdom is free. It is all by grace. Acronym I learned when I was at varsity, God's riches at Christ's expense.

Jesus, the more I listened, the more ridiculous it sounded. Think about that, the more unbelievable it sounded, but the more I was convinced that it was true.

[9 : 06] I could be a part of this kingdom if I just trusted in what Jesus had done for me. As you might have guessed by now, I did trust in Jesus that weekend.

However, my newfound faith didn't last very long because nobody ever told me about the cost. that is the cost of following. I carried on the way I was and then decided that actually this Christianity thing is not for me because it involves a change of lifestyle.

However, through being prayed for and taught and disciplined, God was very gracious to me and called me back to himself. As you sit here this morning and you hear about the kingdom of heaven and this free gift of forgiveness, you might be tempted to jump in without first looking.

But before you decide, you need to know something. If you want to get into the kingdom of heaven, free gift, free, but it's going to cost you. It's going to cost you everything you own.

Now, it's not that you can somehow buy your way into the kingdom, but it does mean and it will mean that you must give up everything you hold dear and hold the kingdom most dear.

[10 : 20] That's actually what it means. But friends, God's kingdom is worth more than the cost of being a disciple. And depending on who you are and where you live and what your history is, that cost will look very different.

So in the Persian Gulf, for example, there's this tremendous pressure on Christians. Should Muslims convert to Christ? Well, they face ostracism, beatings, torture, and in some cases, death. Despite intense persecution, the church in China is growing rapidly, even though there is a great lack of the scriptures as well as well-trained leaders.

Friends, when Christians in North Korea are discovered, they're generally sent to labor camps where horrifying conditions that they have to face and many simply just disappear.

Now, those might be extreme examples, you think, but friends, this is happening today in our world.

Now, we are not in that kind of situation in South Africa where becoming a Christian, where becoming a disciple or a follower of Jesus will cost us that much.

[11 : 25] It costs many, many of these people everything, literally everything, including their lives, which is, we would consider the ultimate price to pay. Yet, friends, the church is growing.

People are still becoming followers of Jesus. People, people like Nick are still committing themselves to a lifetime of telling others about Jesus. Why?

Why would you do that amidst all the hostility? Well, I guess if you could go there and you could find them and you could ask them, they would probably say that the cost of being a disciple fades into insignificance when faced with the immense value of God's kingdom.

Can't think of another reason to do it. As we think about our circumstances here in South Africa, do we think like that? Do we behave like that? See, to be a disciple of Jesus means we are a disciple of Jesus.

Funny thing to have to say, isn't it? It means that we follow him. It means that Jesus is now our boss. It means that Jesus sets the agenda for our lives. It's what it means. The question is, are you willing to give it all up?

[12 : 35] Are you willing to give up everything for the sake of the kingdom? Do you see the kingdom of heaven as that valuable?

Do you consider it a treasure? That is the most valuable of things, of treasures you could ever own. If you do, then the question is, does your life reflect kingdom values?

See? Are your priorities set according to God's kingdom and God's agenda? And that's really where the rubber hits the road. So my car is not worth much, but it is of great value to me.

And to show you that it's of great value to me, I look after my car. I avoid scratching it if I can. I avoid being in accidents. I don't drive like a maniac on the roads. It is insured. I make sure my car gets cleaned, even though I might not actually do it, but I make sure it gets done.

See? I have taken out insurance just in case anything happened to my car then I could fix my car. See, doing all these things tells you something about how I feel about my car, isn't it? It tells you that I value it. What are the things that will show that you value the kingdom of God?

[13 : 46] What are the things that will show you that you prioritize the kingdom above all else? So I'm going to give you a few examples. Here's the way you spend your time governed by the kingdom and kingdom values.

Time is a precious commodity, isn't it? It's extremely valuable. See, if God's kingdom is this treasure, the most valuable thing you can own, are we spending our time promoting this kingdom? If it is a great treasure, surely we want to tell others about the treasure that we find. We get excited about treasures, don't we? We share it. We tell everybody. Are we doing that? What about our resources?

Is it spent on promoting this kingdom, or is the priority us? What about what you're going to do with the rest of your life? That's an interesting one.

Is it about choosing a career that will best advance you up the corporate ladder? Is it about choosing a career that's going to give you the best financial security? I'll ask you a question.

[14:47] Are you willing to give it up? Are you willing to put it all on the line for the sake of Jesus and the kingdom? Are you willing, this is radical, isn't it? Are you willing to turn down that promotion or job offer because it might not help you prioritize the kingdom?

Are you willing to give up everything for the sake of the kingdom? Because Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is valuable. Jesus says it is the most valuable thing you can have.

But he also says it will cost you everything you own. Are you willing to pay the price? Because friends, that's what a follower of Jesus looks like. Someone who has abandoned everything to follow Jesus.

Secondly, Jesus continues and says that God's kingdom is worth more than everything you own. Have a look at verse 45. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. It sounds like the same like the first parable, doesn't it? But it's very different to the first one.

[16:00] Yes, I know it looks the same. But I wonder if you've seen what the major difference between this parable is and the previous parable. See, with the parable of the hidden treasure, we have a guy randomly digging in a field.

Right? With the merchant, we don't have that guy, do we? We have someone who is looking for pearls. That's the difference. Actually, he is a merchant looking for fine pearls, we are told. He is searching and he finds a pearl of great value.

And what does he do when he finds that one pearl of great value? Well, he sells everything he owns to get that one pearl of great value. In both cases, we have men selling everything they own to gain that one thing of great value.

That's a similarity to gain the kingdom of heaven. However, from this parable, we will learn something a little bit different. From this parable, we learn that God's kingdom is worth more than our religious heritage.

See, the fine pearl in this parable is the kingdom of heaven. One can only assume from the context that the other pearls that he might have found are other kinds of religions or other belief systems.

[17:09] This parable speaks to the person who is searching. The person who is searching for God. He's looking. And he looks. And he looks. And he comes across all kinds of things.

All sorts of pearls and religious things that he has collected, that he buys over the years. It could be that those pearls are religious traditions or religious heritage.

Remember, he's speaking to the Jews in Matthew. They have a great heritage. But they are also searching. Remember, they're searching. And they're looking. And they're waiting.

They're waiting for Messiah to come who would save them. Now, Jesus is on the scene. He has arrived. There's no need to search anymore. Because the kingdom of heaven arrived when God's king arrived.

Once they recognize that, they must get rid of everything they own. They must give up all the other pearls that they may have collected. They must surrender all to get their hands on the one fine pearl, which is far more valuable than anything else they could ever own.

[18:12] Now, friends, you might be searching for God. Over the years, you have collected many pearls. The pearls of religion, maybe. You might have your traditions.

You might have your thoughts on certain issues. You might have a blended what you believe. In other words, you've taken a bit from here and a bit from there and made a religion that suits you, that is convenient for you.

Maybe you were raised a certain way, which has influenced your beliefs. And there might be certain things that you believe that you will find very hard to let go of. Now, when I first shared the message of the kingdom with my father, my dad, and told him, John chapter three, that he needed to be born

again, he told me that I was talking absolute nonsense.

Reason? He had never heard of such a thing. And the Bible I have must have been changed. After all, he grew up in a Roman Catholic boarding school where he was an altar boy, where he attended mass religiously.

And he knows things. See, he had a history with certain beliefs and traditions. He had a collection of pearls. And when he heard of the kingdom of God, he would not give up all the other pearls that he had collected over the years.

[19 : 39] Sadly, he died with all those pearls of his. But he did not possess the fine pearl of greatest value. Still a great source of sadness for me to this day.

Is there anything else I could have done? Surely I should have pushed harder. Surely I could have prayed more. Looking back, I can now see that there was nothing else I could have done. My dad, he was a great dad, saw the pearl of greatest value.

It was right there. And he did not recognize its worth. Friends, if you are not yet a member of this kingdom, please don't make the same mistake that he did.

See, Jesus is not saying in these parables that you can buy your way into the kingdom. What he is teaching us is that the kingdom of God is valuable. It is more valuable than anything else in this world.

Do you recognize the value of God's kingdom? But to get it, friends, to gain access to this kingdom, you've got to leave everything else behind.

[20 : 48] You've got to do it. You have to give up everything. You can't give up some things or most things. It's everything or it's nothing. Christians, will you do it? If you're not yet a part of the kingdom, will you abandon everything?

And if you are part of God's kingdom, please remember and don't forget, it is the most valuable thing you could ever have. Prioritize it.

Build your life around it. Treasure it. And thank God daily that you're part of it. Will you pray with me? Father, thank you for making access into your kingdom possible.

people, thank you so much for Jesus, that because of his death and resurrection, we can have our sin forgiven. Thank you for those of us who have already believed this message. We pray that you would help us truly understand what it now means to be a member of your kingdom.

Help us to live lives that reflect the kingdom values. Help us to be willing to give up everything we hold dear and hold the kingdom most dear. And Father, we recognize that there would also be some among us who have not yet believed.

[21 : 58] We ask that you would open their minds to understand, open their ears to hear, and help them to trust in you. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.