

Treasure in the Church

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[0 : 00] Now, I want to talk to you today about treasure, and treasure that can be found in this church or in any church. I want to talk to you about the Bible's great treasure.

Now, you remember some years ago, not some years ago, some months ago, Kim Kardashian, the famous TV personality, lost a lot of pearls in the city of Paris.

You remember that? Somebody broke into her compartment and stole all of her pearls. Now, they stole her pearls because they were stealable. They were outside external things.

They were things that you could tangibly touch and that you could tangibly grasp and you could tangibly take away. So they managed to get a hold of it, and they stole it, worth millions and millions of rands.

But this morning, I read another story told by Baroness Cox, who's a famous British lady who took a tremendous interest in the poor and the oppressed of the world, and she was asked on one occasion, what was the worst experience she's ever experienced in all of her charity work that she's done around the world?

[1 : 05] And she said it was on a visit to Sudan where the Dinka people had been attacked. One little village had been attacked by the northern insurgents, and the village had been absolutely decimated.

And the children were all taken away to be slaves, and the men had been killed, all taken away as slaves. And a lot of the women had been taken away as well, and all of the women had been violated.

And when the Baroness and her team arrived, the village was just recovering from this tremendous attack. And she was astonished to see that the remaining people in the village were making little crosses of sticks and sticking them into the ground.

So she asked those with her, what are they doing? Are they putting this in as markers for the people who had been killed? And the reply was, no, they're not. This is their way of saying, no matter what happens, we are sticking with the Christian message with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so they stuck their little crosses in the ground as a sign of their determination to remain Christians no matter what happened. And the reason why those people were able to do that is because unlike Kim Kardashian, who kept her jewels in a safe and took them around the world with her, these poor people had a greater treasure that they put into their hearts, and no one could take away from them.

[2 : 20] Not even the greatest of tragedies could take away the treasure that was in their hearts. Now in that little passage that was read for us a few moments ago, there are two parables that the Lord Jesus Christ told about the kingdom of God, or about the things of God, or about the things of the Spirit, or about the gospel.

The things that we value, the world that is not external, the world that is internal. And Jesus said, 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. And 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 he bought it. And in these two parables, the one about hidden gold and the one about finding a fine pearl, what the Lord Jesus Christ is saying is that what he has come to do, what he has come to offer, the message of God, the message of the gospel, is like a treasure.

It's like a pearl. It is something that is of tremendous value. It is so great and so valuable, you cannot put an earthly value upon what it is that the Lord Jesus Christ came to do.

[3 : 28] It is of tremendous value. Because what Christ came to do for us, no one else can do for us. Only he could do for us what was done for us on the cross. We just go about our ordinary everyday lives here.

We just try to find some way to survive every week and every month. We just battle along and we forge along day by day. And sometimes there are many people, of course, around us who are totally oblivious of the fact that there is another world, that there is another dimension, that there is a world to come, that we are all heading for a final, eternal destiny.

And so we just get on with our lives. Sometimes we awaken to the fact that there is something more to come. And then we find the gospel, and the gospel transforms us. And some of you have been confronted by the gospel in recent times.

And you've discovered that the gospel is something you can't touch or handle. It's not tangible. It's something that happens internally in you. And it's the result of a message of one person who came down from heaven, the second person of the Trinity, into our world, became a man, died on a cross, rose again from the dead.

And on that cross, he bore the guilt, he bore the stain, he bore the penalty of our guilt before God's justice and righteousness. He bore it all for us. He rose again from the dead, and he makes it now possible for us to be reconnected with God again.

[4 : 49] He opened a door for us that no one else could ever open. So the message of the Lord Jesus Christ tells us that we are all poor in God's sight. We're not born into this world rich.

We're all born into this world poor. And we're not talking about material things. We're talking about spiritual poverty. We're talking about an attitude of heart. We're talking about the vacancy in our souls.

That's what we are talking about. And this is true of rich people and poor people. It is true of everybody in the world, no matter where they come from or no matter what status they may have in society.

We are born into this world with a poverty of soul. We are born into this world. The Bible describes it in different ways. One of the words that the Bible uses is to tell us that we are dead to God.

So we're born into this world with absolutely no affiliation to God. We are born without any desire for God. We are born with no connection with God.

[5 : 46] We are born with all of our inclinations to walk away from God. That's how we are born into this world. And the Bible describes those inclinations as poverty. That's how we come into this world.

And sometimes because of that we wander off into life and we have experiences in life which are bad. And we don't know how to handle them or integrate them into our view of the universe.

And we have what one writer has described as torn souls. We've got souls with holes in it because life batters us and life beats us. And life hurls its disappointments at us.

And we feel battered down and beaten and defeated very often. And one person says it's like having a hole in your soul. And when you talk to people who are beaten down by life and sometimes who are depressed or sometimes discouraged, that's what they will tell you in their own words.

They will tell you their story. But what they really are saying is I've got a hole in my soul in that place in my life where I really live, where I feel, where that deep place in my soul where I should be connected to something real.

[6 : 50] I'm not connected to something real. And there's a hole there in my soul. And that is what the Bible means when it talks about being poor spiritually. Some people are poor and they don't know it.

And some people are poor and sometimes they do know it. But when they don't know it, they just bumble through life and bump against all of the bullies of life, all of the things that life throws at us.

We bump against it. We get hurt. We get wounded. We say to ourselves, why do these things happen to us? And why is life so hard? And why do I have to go through all these hurts and these disappointments?

Or why are my children like that? Or why is my husband like that? Or why is my wife like that? Or why did I lose my job again? You know, what is it that life is so hard and so difficult to get through?

And we're speaking the language of poverty-stricken people. That's what we're speaking. Not poverty-stricken in a material sense, but poverty-stricken in a spiritual sense.

[7 : 48] There are many people who don't recognize that, of course. They come into this world and they develop great pride and great arrogance. And they feel that they've got all the answers to life. And they will fight against any notion of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And there are people like that in our world today. But here Jesus tells us three things about these treasures that we ought to bear in mind. The Lord Jesus Christ gives these two little stories about people finding treasure.

And there are three important lessons to learn from it. So if you're ready, here they are. The first lesson to learn is this. Is that sometimes the treasure of the gospel, that is the finding of the Lord Jesus Christ, the discovery of salvation, the treasure of the gospel, sometimes is found by accident.

That's what Jesus is telling us. We don't plan to do it. We don't plan on becoming Christians. We don't plan on going to church. We don't plan on believing in God or being people of the Bible.

We don't plan on that. But sometimes it seems to happen to us by accident. So Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. That's what it's like.

[8 : 55] The truth, the gospel, the truth about the Lord Jesus dying on the cross, is like treasure hidden in a field. And when a man found it, he hid it again. Then in his joy went and sold all he had and he bought the field.

How did the man find it? Well, in all likelihood, he was just going about his normal life, doing the things that normal people do. He was probably plowing his field. In those days, a man had to earn his living just like we have to do today.

In that agricultural society, if people had a little field, they'd have to plow it every season so the crops would come, so they could keep body and soul together. And in the ordinary struggles of life, this man comes across the treasure.

He's not looking for it. He doesn't expect it. But he comes across this treasure. And the treasure is so great, it totally overwhelms him. So he sells. He goes and buys his field because he was probably renting the field when he found it.

He goes to buy the fields that he can claim the treasure that was overwhelming for him. And that's a true indication of how it is for many of us today. There are many people in life who will tell you, well, I live my life just as I want to.

[10 : 00] I listened to a testimony just yesterday of a man who came out of a Christian family, but he turned his back on every single thing he ever knew, and he became a huge guy, huge football, huge rugby player.

And he became not from this country. He became notorious for his parting, for all the bad things that he had done, for all the wild ways that he had developed.

But you know what happened to him? He was plowing his field, getting on with his life, getting jobs where he could, just parting where he could. But he needed a computer. So he rode back home, and his sister sent him a second-hand computer, and she wiped the computer clean.

But you know what she did? She left two sermons on it. And one day when he was trying to fiddle with his computer, he came across these two sermons, and he listened to them. And in that instant, the man plowing the field suddenly discovered the treasure.

His heart was opened. He didn't expect it to be. He didn't even want it to be. He wasn't looking for it. He had a head knowledge of all these things. But in that moment, as he heard the treasure explained to him, his heart was opened, and he fell next to his bed on his knees, and he gave his life to Jesus Christ, and today he is an evangelist in another country, preaching the gospel to other people.

[11 : 13] This huge ex-rugby player, six foot four, with tattoos all down his arms, a real tough-looking guy you don't want to meet in an alleyway at night. And there he is, sharing the treasure with other people on a weekly basis.

And sometimes it is true for you, is that sometimes you will walk through life, and you won't expect it, and someone will say to you, well, won't you come to church, we've got an anniversary service, or won't you come for the special service, you can say, oh, well, he's a friend, or she's a friend, I'll go with him.

And unexpectedly, you're confronted by the treasure. And you say, hey, but this is for me. Hey, this is good. This is excellent. It feels good. It's touching me where I need to be touched.

And so before you know it, you are swept up into the kingdom of God, and you become saved. Now, I say to you that the man found it by accident, but we know there are no accidents with God. We know that in his sovereign plannings for the world, he plans things so that those upon whom he has set his love will come to him.

And so sometimes it seems to us as if it's by accident. We read a book, or we come across a Bible, or we remember something from the past, or we run into a difficulty, and suddenly memories of past Sunday school lessons come to us, or whatever it may be, however it may be, we suddenly, unexpectedly, without any intention on our part, we become Christians.

[12 : 32] A man came to see me on Friday. He's a man who I met many, many years ago, and I've lost touch with him. I haven't seen him for nearly 20 years. And he left a little note in my letterbox.

He said, This is my name. You may remember me. You had dealings with me a long, long time ago. And I wonder if you can phone me and we can make an appointment.

And so I did. And so we met up. And he said, I wanted to say thank you to you for the day that I came to see you. I didn't mean to see you that day. It wasn't my intention.

I was visiting a friend who lived in the St. James area. He said, And while I was visiting with him, he said, I want you to come meet my pastor. He said, Okay, I'll meet your pastor.

And he went to meet me. And my friend introduced him. And he said to me, I am an atheist. And I don't remember this, but he said to me, Well, you treated me kindly.

[13 : 27] You put your arm around me. You had a chat to me. And you explained the gospel to me. But I was an atheist. I did not want what you had to offer. I didn't want what you had to say to me. But I found myself coming to the church.

And I found myself converted. And I just wanted to express thanks for that. He didn't intend that to happen. There was no plan on his part. He just went about his life socializing, plowing his field.

And then suddenly, before he knew it, he was confronted by the gospel. The gospel put a hook into his heart and drew him to Christ. And he was a transformed person. That's why you should never give up on anybody you love.

Don't give up on anybody. Pray for them constantly. That God will speak to them while they're plowing their fields. While they're having their parties, doing their jobs, living their lives, raising their kids.

That God will suddenly uncover something for them so that they will discover the treasure. Then the second thing Jesus said was this. Is that some people find the treasure because they look for it.

[14 : 24] And this is what he says. 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.

In our Lord's day, as in our day today, people dealt in jewelry. And there were pearl merchants found all around the Middle East part of the world. Pearls were considered of great value. Pearls are often mentioned in the Bible.

And in fact, in the visions and revelation, the gates of heaven are described as pearls. Pearls were considered to be of great value in those days. And this pearl merchant that Jesus uses in the parable describes a man whose job is to look for fine pearls.

And he travels the whole Mediterranean area looking for that one pearl that he knows is going to be the master of all others. And then one day he enters into a market somewhere and he discovers this pearl.

And he's overwhelmed by its beauty. He's overwhelmed by how superb it is. And so the scripture says, when he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

[15 : 26] I must have this, he says. No matter what the cost is, I must have this one. This is the one that I've been looking for. Now there are many people in our world today who are like that in a spiritual sense.

There are people who question. There are people who think. One of the great philosophers of the world calls these moments when we think or feel something that we can't articulate, something that is greater than ourselves.

When we have this longing to find the truth, one of the great philosophers says, he calls it moments of transcendence. Haven't you had a moment of transcendence in your life? You've listened to a song and suddenly you feel, there must be something more.

Or you've watched a movie. Or you've read a book. Or some things happened in your family and you said, it can't be like this. There must be something more. That's a moment of transcendence. When in your thinking, you begin hunting down reality.

When you begin looking for, without you even meaning to do it. You're not sitting down every day and saying, okay, what am I going to do now to look for reality? I'm going to do one, two, three, and four. It's not like that. It's an unconscious thing.

[16 : 28] And there's something in your heart that is saying, there must be something more. There must be something more to life. There must be something that I'm missing. And so there's a hunger that develops within you.

There's a longing that develops within you. And you can't put a word to it. You can't describe it. There's no adjectives for it. And you just know that when something happens that touches you, you respond to it.

And it's all part of this longing you've got for an ultimate reality. You're searching for the great pearl. You see, that's what you're doing. You don't know it. And Jesus says, this is what is happening. You're looking for it.

And you don't know it. But then Jesus says, this merchant in his story, one day finds this great pearl. So what's he doing? He's sifting it all. He's measuring pearl by pearl.

And he's looking at the values and the flaws and the little cracks and the little fissures and the little pearls. And he's looking for the pearl. And one day, he finds the perfect one. And when he puts that against all the other things that he's been looking at, he can see its superiority.

[17 : 30] And he says, yes, this is it. This is it. And that's what happens to us. You know, we listen to all these people who tell us about the New Age things. We listen to all the other traditional things that we learn about in this life.

We listen to people's views. We listen to what the atheists say. We listen to other people's views of Christianity and people who are saying, oh, well, I've got my own ideas of God and I'll get to heaven one day because I've been good.

You know, we'll do all those things and listen to those things and compare all these things together. Then one day, when we hear the gospel, whether it's in a church or from the lips of a friend or from a book we read or from a radio station you may be listening to, suddenly the thing falls into place and you say, all the other things I've listened to does not compare with this.

This is the truth. This is the pearl. And so, you take that pearl for yourself and you say, this is what I need for my soul. And that's the way it works for some people.

Now, of course, once again, Jesus describes people as searching. But we know that the sovereign God is behind even our searching. The Lord leads us and guides us.

[18 : 39] We're longing, we're searching for him. But we wouldn't, by nature, be searching for God. So God puts it into our heart to begin to look. God places into our heart a hunger.

God places something in our hearts that we can't actually define. We couldn't explain it to a friend if they asked us to. But we just know that something's not right in life. That things are out of kilter.

And we need that something that we can't explain to bring a center to our lives. And that person is the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, Jesus says that on the one hand, sometimes people find the truth by accident.

It seems to them by accident. But behind it, there's the hand, the unseen hand of a sovereign God. And on the other hand, there are some people who begin searching and looking for this. And behind their longings is the unseen hand of a sovereign God.

And so, maybe that describes you today. Maybe you have accidentally found the gospel. You didn't expect to. Here you are in life, dragged into this church somehow, somewhere, or to a friend somewhere.

[19 : 42] And suddenly, you are confronted. You are confronted with a truth that you can't counter. You can't argue against. You can try to, but you can't argue against it because the gospel is the hammer that breaks the rock in pieces.

The gospel hammer will break all arguments in pieces. All arguments in pieces. The gospel will do that. And you can't argue against it. Or it may be that in your heart you've been looking and searching and you've been coming along here looking and searching and wanting to find the truth.

And maybe you have. And maybe you haven't. But the truth resides in the story of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ where he died in our place as a substitute to take our punishment so that we would not have to face the day of judgment.

He did that because God the Father loved us so much that he sent his son into the world. So for you sitting here today you need to know that you are hearing words like this and other words spoken when Nick is here and others are preaching here.

You need to know that you are hearing these words because God loves you. Not because he hates you. Because he loves you. He hasn't abandoned you. He loves you and therefore he gets you to hear the words of the gospel which is the pearl of great price.

[21 : 00] It's the treasure that is hidden in the field. But there's one third thing that Jesus said and it's this. He said that when the man found the treasure by accident he went and sold all he had and bought that field.

And when the man found the pearl that was better than all the other pearls he went away and sold everything he had and he bought it. In other words Jesus said when they discovered the treasure they took action to make that treasure their own.

Now you know what I think happens in many congregations and many groups of people today is that they hear the gospel sufficiently and they believe the gospel sufficiently not to argue with it anymore.

but they don't take the final step of making the gospel their own. You know my friends it's possible to sit in the church all your life and to hear the gospel proclaimed and not have any argument with it and finally at the end of your life to die and be lost for all eternity because you never reached out your hand to take the treasure never reached out your hand to take the pearl.

You cannot say Jesus is mine. You cannot say that. You can say Jesus is real. You can say Jesus is historical.

[22 : 24] You can say Jesus is good. You can say Jesus is great. You can say Jesus is the savior. You can say Jesus is the treasure.

But you cannot say Jesus is mine because you never took him for yourself into your own heart and life. So the Lord Jesus Christ urges us in these parables to make a response.

On the one hand the man sells the field and buys it so he can get the treasure. On the other hand the man sells all he has to buy the pearl. You don't have to go and sell everything. What you have to do is make sure that your heart has totally and willingly and voluntarily embraced the truth about Christ and say Lord Jesus be mine.

Be mine. Now this treasure is in this church. That's why you come here because we preach it here. And it's in any church where the true gospel is preached.

And how sad for people to come every Sunday Sunday by Sunday and to end their lives without the treasure being made. So here you are in the presence of the treasure again and I'm sure that most of you have already opened your hearts to the Lord Jesus but it may be that there's someone in you who hasn't and maybe today you've got to take that final little half step just a half step just the point where you've hesitated.

[23 : 54] You don't have to be persuaded about anything except this one thing you have got to be committed to Christ yourself. Well may that be so today.

Now let's pray together. Now we just pause for a moment before I pray and hand back the service again. Let's pause for a moment and here's something that you can think about and here's something you can say to God yourself.

Think about this. Of all the things that I believe about Jesus do I believe that he's mine? and if you're not sure of that then talk to God about it and make sure of it now.

You can do it in this way. I'll pray a prayer for you. Almighty God I am so grateful to hear about Jesus but I've lived with hesitation.

I've lived at arm's length from him. I haven't taken that final step. but please help me to do it now. Now Lord Jesus become mine.

[25 : 11] Help me Heavenly Father to love Jesus value him and embrace him and to be a different person from this day on.

Amen.■■■■ to Happy to him you not if be to I mean every year you like me I never know you do