

KINGDOM OF WORTH

Series: Stories Jesus Told

August 9, 2015

Adam Mosley

Jesus, Parables, Kingdom of God, Treasure, Pearl, Worth

Matthew 13:44-46

So, I went on a hunting expedition this week. I was hunting big game...REALLY big game. Not the four-legged variety though. What I was hunting for wasn't a lion or leopard, and elephant or rhino. No, I was on the hunt for something even more elusive: property! I was looking for a space. I was searching for a compound - a home for this church and a place for us to pilot some of the life-giving, city-changing stuff we feel called to do here in Nakuru. But man, it's hard work hunting for property! I've got half of Nakuru helping us look for a place, and still haven't found it. But I have faith that God has something special out there for us.

But you know, when you're looking for property, there are certain things you look for. The first one - the big one - is location. They say that real estate is about three things: location, location, location. For a church and a community hub, location is pretty key! If we want to be at the heart of activity in this city, we should probably be pretty close to the city. If we wanted to be a kilometer off the tarmac in Pipeline, it would be much easier to find a place. But location is important.

But even in the right location, it has to be the right place. The land has to be right - a large enough plot for things like a large gathering space (like this tent) and for parking and for, hopefully, a playground for the kids. It has to be the right piece of land.

Then, if the location and land are right, we also are looking for a particular type of structure. To do what we're trying to do, we'll want something with a kitchen and toilets and some larger rooms where our kids can meet on Sunday and where we can have our coworking space and other meetings on occasion.

Then, if all of those other factors are right - the location, the land, the structure - then it comes down to price. And we have a budget that we're working with. If money was no object, we would have a lot more available options, wouldn't we? We have to be reasonable about how much we spend.

But, you know, if I found the absolute perfect property. If I found, like, an updated house with large rooms on a flat, 2 acre compound that was close to town. If it was the perfect place, I would figure out the money. Right? Even if it was a stretch for our budget, I would call and email everybody I know to come up with the money. For the perfect place, I would figure out a way.

Which reminds me of some stories Jesus told...

A couple of weeks ago, we started this series called Stories Jesus Told where we were looking at these stories that we sometimes call parables - fictional stories told by Jesus in order to get people thinking about this thing called the Kingdom of God. Very often, Jesus would say, "The Kingdom of God is like..." and then tell a story about something that often didn't make a whole lot of sense. And people would walk away saying, "What on earth did that mean?" But they were talking! And they were thinking! Talking and thinking about the Kingdom of God.

Today, we're going to look at a couple of really short stories that Jesus told about the value of that Kingdom. I've called this talk Kingdom of Worth.

But first, let me pray that God will open our eyes, ears, and hearts to what he has for us this morning.

Prayer

One of the stories Jesus told was this really short one found in Matthew, the first book of what we call the New Testament in the bible. It goes like this (Matthew 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."

Matthew 13:44

It's worth noting here that when we talk about the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven, those are the same thing. The Jewish authors like Matthew tended to shy away from saying or writing the word God, and so, when they talked about these things, they would often substitute the word "heaven" for God. And as such, when they talked about the kingdom of heaven, they weren't talking about some super-cool place you go when you die. They were talking about this reality of God - the way God breaks into our world with his perfection. So, that's what Jesus is talking about here. And it's something pretty cool.

Think about it. There once was a man, and he's going through this field, and he finds something. Now, I should probably back up and say that Jesus lived in a time and place where, if you had something of value, there weren't many safe places you could keep it. They didn't have banks and vaults and things like that. Even their homes weren't terribly secure places to keep things. And so, if you were a landowner, it was pretty common to just bury things out on your land in a place only you knew about. That way, if someone came and robbed your house and took everything you had (or everything they could *find*), you would be able to revisit that site and retrieve your buried valuables.

The problem that happened sometimes, though, is that somebody would bury something like this and then die without letting anyone know they had buried anything. So, I imagine in this case (I can imagine whatever I want, because it's a fictional story), maybe the landowner buried this treasure, then died, and maybe the eldest son inherited the land.

And this son had no idea about the buried treasure. What he did know is that he had no real use for the land. So, maybe he leased it to this guy to farm. I mean, that would make sense. It's kind of one of two possible scenarios. Either this guy was walking through a field he had no business in (and was, simultaneously, excavating said field), *or* he had some reason to be digging around. So, possibly he leased the field to farm it, and he was out plowing one day, and he sort of, *clunk!*, hit this thing.

Ooh, what was that? A big rock? He leans down to inspect it and sees that it's not a rock. It's a box of some sort. He digs around it with his hands and finds a lid. He opens it. And what he finds inside is unbelievable! Jewels, gemstones and gold of unfathomable worth!

And the guy has a thought. "I wonder," he thinks, "if I could buy this field. The son doesn't really have any use for it. He's leasing it to me. Maybe he would be interested in selling it." And so he goes to the son and, sure enough, the son is willing to sell and they agree on a price. Of course, it's far more than the man can actually afford to pay...except he knows something the son doesn't know. He knows about the treasure. He knows that whatever he pays for the field, that amount is far exceeded by the value of what is *buried* in the field.

So, in an effort to come up with the asking price, he just goes on a selling spree. He's posting pictures of all his stuff on Facebook. He's got, like, 70 OLX listings. He's standing on Odinga Odinga with, like, lamps for sale. This guy is hustling to get the money to buy that field.

And then he does it. He buys the field...and the treasure buried in it. My question is, "Was it worth it?"

Was it worth selling all his possessions? Was it worth giving up everything he had in order to buy that field?

Of course it was. Of course it was. To give up everything you have in order to receive something far greater - that's a good deal! Of course it's worth it! And Jesus says, "That's what the Kingdom of God is like. It's worth whatever price you pay to get it."

But we don't think that way, do we? Somehow, even though we can see the value in something like giving some loose change in return for some paper money, it's not always so clear when it comes to giving up things for the treasure of God, right? Like, we've overvalued

certain things to the extent that we think we're making some kind of sacrifice if we give them up.

You know, most of us, if someone said, "How would you like to be rich and famous and powerful," we'd be like, um...yeah! And if someone was like, "How would you like to be poor, but have an incredibly rich life, full of intimacy with God, and empowered by him to have a massive impact on those around you," we'd be like...hmmm...let me get back to you. Right? We've kind of got it backwards.

The funny thing is, though, a lot of people who have those things we value so much - the fame and money and power - are, like, really messed up because they're realizing that those things aren't as valuable as we think they are.

I mean, think about people at the pinnacle of what we think we want. Like, a Hollywood celebrity. I mean, come on, every woman in Kenya dreams of being the next Lupita! I mean, I think I might like to have George Clooney's life. But then, I read this. There was a study done a while back about the things that celebrities think about - the things that stress them out. Here are the top 10 things that sort of consume the thoughts of celebrities:

- Press coverage (what is going to be written and said about them)
- Critics
- Threatening letters and calls
- Lack of privacy
- Constant monitoring of their lives (the inability to ever mess up without it being public knowledge)
- Worry about career plunges
- Stalkers
- Lack of security
- Curious fans
- Worries about their children's lives

Now, does that sound like a fun life? You know, when Barack Obama, one of the most famous and powerful men in the world came to Kenya, he had to bring an army of security personnel and a giant armored car with him just to feel safe enough to get through Nairobi. Does that sound like a life you would want?

We somehow have a glitch in our brains that tells us that money and fame and power will fix our problems. But those who have money and fame and power know that those things bring their own problems. They aren't as valuable as they sometimes seem.

In fact, a study of American celebrities (I couldn't find one that studied Kenyans) found that celebrities are four times more likely to kill themselves than the average person. The

average lifespan of a celebrity is almost 20 years shorter than the average person. They are living the lives we think we want, and they're depressed, paranoid, addicted to things, untrusting.

God has designed us for something better - something more than fame and money and power. He's designed us to be participants in his Kingdom - to help inject life into a dying world - and in the process, to discover the priceless treasure of God's Kingdom.

And when we see it for what it is, we'll be like the guy buying the field. What does it say? *In his joy*, he went and sold all he had. He gave it all up because he knew what he was getting in return was worth far more than he could ever hope to pay.

Right after the treasure story, Jesus tells another one. 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."

Matthew 13:45-46

So, this is kind of the same thing, right? This guy finds something of value and is willing to sell everything he has in order to buy it. But there's one significant difference here between these two men. Do you see it?

The first guy was going along, minding his own business, and he kind of stumbled upon this treasure, right? But the second guy, what does it say? He was a merchant *looking for* fine pearls. So this guy was a bit of a treasure hunter, while the other guy was just an accidental treasure *finder*. (By the way, if any of you happen to just stumble upon the perfect property for our church this week, you just let me know! I'm a hunter, but I'm taking calls from finders!)

Some of you may recognize yourself in one of these two guys.

Maybe you're like that first guy. Maybe somebody drug you here one day. You didn't want to come. Maybe you came just for social reasons, or because your kids wanted to come. And you came here, and God did something. You sort of stumbled upon the truth of God. You stumbled upon this little community where people are welcoming and care for each other and seem genuinely happy to be here. And maybe you caught a glimpse of God in the midst of what's going on here, and you're, like, digging around a bit now to see what it is you've stumbled upon.

For others, that seems almost unfair. Right? Like, you've been searching and searching to try to figure out the big truths of life. You've been on a quest. You've been reading books and listening to lectures. Maybe you've tried various religions or meditation techniques. You've devoted yourself to finding the truth. And maybe you've found something here. In a big bag

of pearls, you've found *the* pearl. You've found the truth of God and the Kingdom of God. (And, let's be honest, you're kind of frustrated by that other dude who just stubbed his toe on it over there!)

You know, there's more than one way to find God. There are all kinds of paths that people take in their journey of discovery. For me, I knew *about* God and *believed* in God long before I came to a place of *knowing* God. My journey has been one where I had all the documentation in advance. Like, I had a map to the treasure. I had heard a lot about the treasure. I knew other people who had seen the treasure. But it took me a while before I actually made the journey for myself, laid my eyes and hands on that treasure, understood its worth, and decided to go all-in to get it.

Wherever you are, realize this: It's worth it. Whatever you walk away from pales in comparison to what you're walking *into*.

If you're here today and have never decided to give Jesus a chance, I would just ask you to do that today. I'm not asking you to commit to coming to this church or to, you know, giving money or anything like that. Maybe you just say, "You know, if there's really a treasure in this field - if there's really a valuable pearl in this bag - then it's definitely worth giving up whatever I need to in order to obtain it."

Take that risk. The odds, as they say, are ever in your favor!

There's one other truth that I think we need to take away from these stories, and that is this: This is a hidden treasure - a previously unnoticed pearl.

Picture this: What if, all around us, everything we see is a bit of a facade? What if the physical world as we know it is just a cheap cover over a priceless work of art? What if, underneath this dirty, broken veil of a world, there exists something pristine, something perfect, something of God? And what if, when we're willing to walk away from some of our own false securities, God will lift the veil for us a bit? What if, when we lay down *our* stuff and pick up *God's* stuff, only then will the treasure be revealed to us?

You see, we are a confused people. We've grown up only ever knowing the veiled world. But the apostle Paul, a key leader in the 1st century church, says that in our lives, it's like we're seeing a dim reflection. Not only are we not experiencing God's reality, but we're only kind of seeing it - like looking into a polished piece of metal. And we think that's reality. But that's not God's reality.

If we are willing to give up the shiny piece of metal, God will show us the real thing.

And somebody's like, "Now wait, Adam. I've been hanging out around here a while, and you like to talk about this free gift of grace - that God loves us no matter what. Now, you're talking about me *paying* something - giving up something. That doesn't sound like free."

Well, if I gave you 5,000 shillings in exchange for a few coins from your pocket, would you say that, for all intents and purposes, that was a gift given freely? I mean, it wasn't really a transaction, was it? Sure you gave me some pocket change, but to say you *paid a price* would be an exaggeration. In fact, *I* paid the price. I got almost nothing in return.

What you did was to walk away from a little in order to gain a lot. I think any of us would gladly accept that kind of deal.

And, in actuality, it's almost more like this. Imagine that I brought you back and says, "Here's your change back. Thank you for being willing to give it up. You can keep it all."

That's what the Kingdom of God is like. When we are willing to give up everything, God says, "You owe me nothing. In fact, *you are my treasure. You are my pearl.* And I'm willing to give up everything for *you.*"

Let's pray

Prayer

We're going to move now into a time of personal response. And there several ways to respond:

1. Singing

We're going to sing some songs together that help us reflect on some of these things.

While that singing is taking place, you will also have the opportunity for prayer.

2. Prayer

If you need prayer for anything at all, we have people here who are eager to do that.

Also, while that is going on, you'll have a chance to take communion

3. Communion

Communion is a symbolic act, instituted by Jesus as a way for us to remember the way he willingly died for us. The unleavened bread serves as a symbol of Jesus' body broken on the cross. The wine or juice symbolize his blood that was spilled for us.

We have people ready to serve you communion. Juice is on your left, wine is on your right. Feel free to partake of either, as it fits with your tradition. Just break off a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup, and eat.

We offer communion each week for *anyone* who wants to take it. There's no membership requirement or hoops to jump through. You are guests at this symbolic table of Jesus, so please feel free to partake.

4. Giving

Lastly, during this time, you will have an opportunity to give financially to the work of this church. If you're a guest with us today, we don't expect you to give anything. However, for those who consider this your church home, and for those who believe in what we're trying to do here, this is our chance to give back to God a portion of what he has given us, and to support the work he has called this church to in Nakuru.

There is a tall box at the back with a slot in it. You can place your gifts in that box at any time as we are singing together.

So those are the four ways to respond: Singing, Prayer, Communion, and Giving. All will be happening simultaneously. There's no order you have to do them in. You don't have to do them all. You don't have to do any of them. This is your time to respond in whatever way you desire.

At the end of that time, I'll pray a prayer of blessing over you before you go.

Closing Prayer