

## **YOU PURSUE GOD BOLDLY**

**MATTHEW 13:44-46**

Let me I tell you a couple of stories. Here's the first one. Yosef's day begins like any other. He rises before dawn, washes and eats a simple breakfast. Then he treks out wearily to the shed in the dim light to attach a plow to the ox for another day of farming in the hot sun. The ox isn't his. The plow isn't his. The land isn't his either. Yosef thinks about the pittance that he's paid to farm this miserable piece of land by its owner – hardly enough to support his wife and children. A surge of resentment flows through him. Somehow he's managed to save a little money that he keeps buried in the ground near the shed.

As Yosef trudges out to the field he begins to feel more discouraged. The hot sun beats down on him and the sweat rolls off his forehead. The monotony and hopelessness of his life is as suffocating as the heat. Suddenly, he hears a loud scraping noise below him. He stops the plow and walks back a few steps. A piece of wood has been exposed in the soil. Yosef kneels down and brushes more of the dirt away. As he digs, his heart begins to pound with excitement. This is some kind of wooden box he's found in the field. His mind begins to race as he remembers that rich men had often buried their money or jewels in the ground in the hopes of one day returning to reclaim their treasure. Most never returned. Yosef remembers the law of the Pharisees regarding old treasure that's discovered by accident. Whoever discovers treasure, keeps it.

Yosef forces the lid of the chest open. His heart almost stops at the sight! There before him are mounds of gold coins and precious jewels. Yosef glances around quickly. Yes, he's alone; no one has observed his spectacular find. He closes the chest now and covers it with the soil. His heart pounding with joy, Yosef races back to the shed. He eagerly digs up his own meager savings. Carefully, he counts it out. Yes, he thinks to himself, it will be enough – just barely enough - to buy the field outright! Filled with excitement, he makes his way to the home of the owner to buy the field so that he can claim the treasure.

A second story. Eleazar strolls into the marketplace his eyes taking in everything with an air of nonchalance. The canopies of the tents and stalls lie still in the hot, stagnant air. The odor of the marketplace is rank and fetid. Flies buzz lazily in the heat while loud bantering can be heard in many directions. This is Eleazar's world; he's a merchant – a buyer and seller of jewels primarily. He's older now, rather fat and quite prosperous. When he's not selling his wares to wealthy customers, he travels far and wide – searching, longing, always looking. Once, when he was just a boy, Eleazar had heard the story of a pearl – one great pearl of exceptional beauty and brilliance. Was it a just a rumor or a reality? Ever since that day, Eleazar had searched for that one pearl in large city bazaars and little village markets throughout the Mideast always hoping that someday, somehow he would see it and be able to possess that one great pearl.

Today, Eleazar notices a commotion over by the jeweler's stall. He hears several gasps from the crowd that's gathered. He hears someone say, "Look at that pearl! Can you believe it? It must be worth a fortune!" Eleazar's pulse quickens as he walks toward the stall and pushes his way through. Yes! There it is! At last! It's even more beautiful than Eleazar imagined. It's *the* Pearl. He licks his lips nervously, fighting to control his emotions. As casually as possible, he asks the price. He tries to negotiate, but his heart isn't in it. He must have it! Finally, the price is agreed upon. It will cost him everything, but it will be well worth it. Eleazar pours out the entire contents of his money bag into the jeweler's hands. It costs him all he has, but – at last – he has the pearl!

Turn with me to our text today. Jesus' favorite topic was the Kingdom of God and His favorite way of explaining what the Kingdom was like were these "word pictures" – the parables. The Kingdom of God is the realm where Jesus rules and reigns as the King. It's where you connect with God. I'm convinced that Jesus wants you to grasp something of the emotion a person feels when he or she finds the Kingdom of God. That emotion is joy! As a result, you can't help but pursue God boldly. When you find the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom finds you, you experience...

### **MORE NOT LESS.**

Sadly, many people – some of them sincere Christians – believe that becoming a follower of Jesus is an invitation to dullness. It means settling for a restricted life – dull, drab, boring. It took me awhile – and maybe this is true of you – to realize that a relationship with Jesus is not an invitation to dullness. The Kingdom of God is anything but dull. Instead, the call of the Kingdom of God is to joy not to dullness. It's a call to more of life not less of life. To experience the Kingdom is always an invitation to more not to less. Jesus made it clear that it's your sin and self-centeredness that ends up being so restrictive and dull. Sin locks you up in the prison of your own fears, greed, resentments, pride, loneliness, apathy and materialism. Sin prevents you from becoming all that God intends you to be. Sin saps your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual energy. Sin steals away the abundance of life that God wants you to have.

It's wonderfully refreshing to observe followers of Jesus for whom the Kingdom is more not less. The question, "What must I give up to become a Christian?", is ludicrous to them. Give up? No, life is now full of potential and possibilities because they found the Kingdom. Real Kingdom people know that God intends life to be full of adventure and challenge. They sense the tug of great things ahead - another wonderful discovery is always just around the next corner of life. True, sometimes the adventure includes great pain and heartache; nevertheless, the resounding, dominant note for those who've discovered and experienced the Kingdom of God is JOY! Real Kingdom people are becoming the creative, useful, fully alive and reaching out people God always intended. Each day they discover anew the graciousness of their heavenly Father's love. Jesus has not

only revolutionized their attitudes towards themselves, but He's healing their attitudes towards others, too. They appreciate and accept people on a whole new level. The Kingdom of God is anything but restrictive. It brings freedom to become everything God intended you to be.

There is much of value in this world, just as there are many pearls. But just as there is only one pearl of exceptional value in Jesus' story, so there is also just one pearl of utmost value in this life: your relationship with God. That is the great pearl! Life is like a marketplace and each of us has a life with which to trade. How sad it is to see some people trading pebbles for pearls! How easily some trade themselves for what is inferior, cheap and of limited value! Jesus warns you against the all too human tendency to invest your life in things of only limited value. He says, "Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being." (Matthew 6:19-20 MSG) Don't settle for less when you can have the more that God intends for you!

You may have heard of Brother Andrew. He's well known for smuggling Bibles into Communist countries. Before he became a follower of Jesus, Andrew spent some years in the Dutch army. During that time, he bought a young monkey as a pet. Soon, Andrew noticed that whenever he touched the animal around the waist it caused it pain. He examined it and found a raised welt around its entire waist. Andrew carefully laid the monkey down, pulled back the hair and discovered that someone had tied a wire around the middle of the monkey and then failed to remove it. As the monkey grew, the wire had become embedded in its flesh causing a tremendous amount of restriction and discomfort. Andrew shaved off the hair around the monkey's middle and cut gently into his tender flesh until the wire was exposed. The little animal was remarkably patient. Andrew was able to get down to the wire, cut it and pull it away. Instantly, the monkey jumped up, did a cartwheel of joy and danced around Andrew's shoulder – even pulling his hair in glee. When you find the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom finds you, it's as if God cuts away this wire around your life and you find, like that monkey, a life of more not less. When you find the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom finds you, you experience it...

### **NOW NOT LATER.**

When Jesus compares the Kingdom to a treasure or a great pearl, he used symbolism His Jewish listeners understood. They already knew that the Kingdom of God was of utmost value. They longed for the reign of God to begin because they believed it would mean the end of Roman occupation and oppression as well as the beginning of a whole new age of prosperity for the nation of Israel. Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom was new and distinctive because he stressed that it could be experienced now not later. It didn't depend

on the absence or defeat of the Romans! It was already present in His teaching, in His miracles and in Himself as a person. It was now not later!

If the Kingdom of God is now and not later than the joy of following Jesus is something you can experience now and not later. I believe in heaven and the perfect joys of eternal life. And I don't believe that you can ever reach a place in this life where you're free from suffering and hardship. But neither do I believe you have to wait until heaven to enjoy your relationship with God and live daily in that joy. Eternal life doesn't begin when you die and go to heaven; it begins when you surrender to the King and enter His Kingdom.

How is it possible to experience Kingdom joy this side of heaven? How can you have this joy even though you still experience heartaches, painful circumstances and downright train wrecks? It's important to know that finding the Kingdom is not about happiness; it's about joy. Happiness comes and goes. Joy remains. Here's a few things to remember about Kingdom joy. It doesn't depend on favorable circumstances. It's still present and active in life's bitter moments. Kingdom joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit – it's a mark of His presence in your life. Kingdom joy rests on the knowledge that God is somehow using life's struggles for His glory and your good. God never wastes even one sorrow. Kingdom joy is found in the assurance that God always has the last word and that this world is not our final destination. You can have Kingdom joy now not later. My friends, it's when the grapes are squeezed and pressed out that wine becomes a reality. When you see the wine of God's joy in a person's life, you can be sure that it took some squeezing and pressure to make that possible. In the same way, when you find the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom finds you, you experience:

### **ALL NOT SOME.**

The two men in Jesus' stories were different. One was a farmer; the other was a merchant. One found treasure; the other found a pearl. The farmer came upon his discovery by accident; the merchant by a long search. There are similarities as well. First, both of them were overwhelmed by joy at their discovery. That's the primary emotion of the Kingdom of God: joy! Secondly, both of them became totally committed to their unexpected treasure. Can't you feel the excitement with which that farmer approached the owner of the field asking if he could buy it? He offered up all of his meager life savings for that field. There's irony in the emotion. He *wanted* to give up everything he had! Why? Because he knew there was a treasure hidden in the field. He wasn't making some great sacrifice. He wasn't giving up everything to gain nothing. No, he gave up the little he had in order to get something far greater. To the unknowing eye, it seemed very foolish to exchange his life savings for one miserable little plot of land. But he knew – and we know – that he made the wisest choice possible.

Most people don't understand why it's sheer joy to surrender your life to King Jesus. They consider it foolish to become a follower of Jesus when you can be

the master of your own destiny. Studying the Bible, learning to pray, reaching out to spiritually lost people, conforming your lifestyle to biblical values, finding a way to serve the poor, being committed to a local church – all of that seems like such a tremendous, terrible sacrifice to someone who doesn't understand the Kingdom of God. But when you find the Kingdom of God, it calls you to a total life commitment that is at the very same time an invitation to joy.

If these parables teach anything, they teach that God wants all of you not just some of you. The farmer gave everything he had to buy the field. The merchant emptied his pockets to buy the great pearl. Listen to what Jesus is saying! To make Jesus your King is JOY! To have Jesus as your King each day is JOY! If it isn't joy for you, you need to make sure you're really in the Kingdom of God! How can it be some great sacrifice to give up all the restrictions of sin and self-centeredness in order to gain all the limitless potential of a life lived fully with, for and unto God? How is that "sacrifice"?

You recall what Jesus said, "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need." (Matthew 6:33 NLT) That's an invitation to a feast not a famine. John Chrysostom, one of the early church fathers, made this statement, "Men are nailed to the things of this life." You nail yourself to restricted, dull, defeated, limited, stunted living. That's what happens when your ultimate concerns become how to make a living, how to raise your kids or how to enjoy your retirement. Those things aren't evil - just limited, mundane, restricted and worthless in comparison to the one great pearl of infinite value – the pursuit and the experience of the Kingdom of God. The best that can happen to you in this life is that the Kingdom of God becomes more and more the dominating focus of your life. That doesn't mean you neglect the mundane or everyday responsibilities of life, by any means. Instead, it simply means that in comparison to your pursuit of the Kingdom of God, you become carefully careless about everything else. All not some. When you give up your little all, you gain God's abundant immensity. Pursue God boldly. Because when you give all not some, you get more not less and you get it now not later.

Many years ago in one of the most famous cathedrals in Europe, the caretaker was preparing the building for the Sunday services the next day. He thought he was alone in the great cathedral, but then he was startled by a voice behind him. "Hello!" He turned to find a little man dressed in rather tattered, scruffy clothes. "Hello," he responded with a little irritation, "the cathedral is closed now. How may I help you?" "Sir," answered the stranger, "I have come a very long way in order to see the magnificent organ here. Would it be possible just to see it?" "I don't have the authority to show it to you," said the caretaker. "The cathedral organist has very strict orders concerning the organ." "But, sir, I have come such a long way. I beg you, could I just see it?" The caretaker scowled and realized that the man would probably continue to argue with him and waste his afternoon. So he led the little man up the long, winding stairs to the great console of that

magnificent pipe organ. When the stranger saw it, he gasped with awe at the vast array of pedals, keys and stops.

“Sir, would you mind if I just sat on the organ bench?” asked the little man. “Certainly not!” said the caretaker. “What would happen to me if the organist should come at this very moment and see you sitting there on the bench?” “But it will be for only a moment, I promise,” pleaded the stranger. “And I’ve come such a long way and I would be so very disappointed.” Eager to get back to his chores, the caretaker finally relented. “Oh, all right then, but only for a moment and then you will have to go!” The little stranger thanked him profusely and sat down reverently on the bench. The caretaker could see that the man looked very much at home on the organ bench as if he somehow belonged there and knew exactly what he was doing. But even he was taken aback by the next question, “May I play just a few notes on the great organ” asked the man.

“Absolutely not!” hissed the caretaker. “If the cathedral organist came in while you were playing, I would lose my job. I cannot permit such a thing. You must go now!” The stranger’s face dropped and a look of such great sadness covered it that it shocked the caretaker. He could hardly believe the words that came out of his own mouth next, “All right, play just a few notes and then I must ask you to leave the cathedral immediately.” With that the caretaker fled down the stairs to resume his neglected duties.

A few moments later, however, the entire cathedral was filled with the most glorious music that the caretaker had ever heard in that place. It seemed to him as if heaven itself had opened up. He was transfixed by the beauty of it. Who, on earth, was that strange little man? The music stopped as suddenly as it had started and the caretaker hurried towards the organ to find out the identity of the stranger. But the little man was already hurrying down the center aisle of the cathedral. “Stop, sir!” called the caretaker after him. “Who are you?” Without even stopping to turn around, the man hurried towards the front door and said just one thing over his shoulder before he was gone, “Mendelssohn.” The little, tattered stranger was none other than Felix Mendelssohn, the German composer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and perhaps the greatest organist of his day. Once again, the caretaker was alone in that great cathedral. The sounds of that glorious music still seemed to vibrate throughout that place. The caretaker shook his head in disbelief and then said to himself, “Just think of it! I almost denied the master the opportunity to play his music in my cathedral!”

King Jesus is the master organist. Your life is a cathedral. Can He play His glorious music in and through you? Or does your life just sit there occasionally making a few harsh, strange, ugly noises? I invite you to the joyous music of the Kingdom of God this morning – the music that can only be played when King Jesus is allowed to sit at the controls of your life. The call of the Kingdom of God is to more not less. You can have it now not later. And it demands from you and me all not some.