

Matt. 13. 31.33 & 44.52

Have you ever found hidden treasure?

My father found treasure hidden in our garden when he began to make a new vegetable patch. He dug up a beautiful Indian silver tea service. The funny thing was, it was *his* tea service, tea pot, milk jug and sugar bowl! How did it get there? It transpired that my younger brother had taken it to school for show and tell but hadn't asked permission, so decided to bury it until he could get it back into the house without being seen.

Just like my father, the man in the parable who found hidden treasure wasn't actually looking for it, not like today's metal detectorists - anyone got a metal detector? We could ask all sorts of questions as to what this man was doing in the field or *how* he found the treasure, but that's all unimportant - the finding of the treasure and all-out going after it is what we are intended to focus on.

In the last two weeks we've looked at the parables of **the Sower** and the parable of **the Weeds** and Jesus's explanation of their meaning. For the last parable in today's reading - **the parable of the Net** - Jesus also explains the meaning which, like the parable of the weeds, is a picture of the end of the age when the good will be separated from the bad.

The other four parables are left to speak for themselves.

The **mustard seed and the yeast** both seem small and insignificant. Both have a hidden element to them but out of the hiddenness there is huge growth. Apparently the amount of flour the woman used with her yeast would have made about 300 loaves (possibly!), and that tiny mustard seed grew into the largest of trees- an invitation to the birds to come and find shelter. These are pictures of the kingdom's small beginnings with Jesus and his disciples then its growing and spreading like wildfire after the coming of the Holy Spirit.

**The Hidden Treasure and the pearl of great price** are a picture of the *value* placed on the Kingdom. The merchant was actually searching for

this pearl and gladly sold everything he had in order to buy it. He knew that nothing he owned could compare to the great treasure he had finally found. Jesus is not saying that you must go out and sell everything you own. He is saying that you should be willing to. He's saying that nothing compares in value to the new life that the King wants to give you. New life in God's kingdom is much more than going to heaven when we die - although that will be wonderful! Kingdom life is here and now. It is knowing the Father, the King. It is listening to his voice. It's having his peace, his joy, his love, and his power. It's the best life possible. Jesus said, "I have come so that they can have life. I want them to have it in the fullest possible way. (John 10.10)

You should not love anyone or anything more than you love the King, God himself. Think about the words of Jim Elliot, one of the most well known missionaries of the 20th century, killed right at the beginning of a mission to bring the gospel to the Huaorani people of Ecuador. He said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." The emphasis is not on what we give up, but on the unfathomable new life that is being offered to us.

If you belong to the kingdom, you have the greatest treasure! This treasure is freely given by God, to everyone who trusts in him.

The kingdom of God is worth far more than anything else.

Treasure is important in Matthew's gospel, showing us what it's like and where our allegiance ultimately lies. (Matt.6.19-21) Jesus says, "Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also."

We see this with the rich young man who wanted to know what he needed to do to get eternal life. It appears that he lived an upright life following the commandments, but Jesus told him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell all your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." (Matt 19.21) Jesus knew where the young man's heart lay. He couldn't let go of his riches.

Another way to look at the treasure is to understand it as being like God's Kingdom, and Jesus is the one who gave up everything to obtain it for us. Or, better still, what if *we* are the treasure, and Jesus is the one who, 'because of joy' gave his life in order to 'buy' us. The word for buy is the same word that is sometimes translated 'redeem' in passages such as Gal. 3.13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming the curse for us.' and 4.4 God sent his Son to redeem those under the law that we might receive the full rights of sons.

The treasure and the pearl parables can emphasize both the cost of discipleship *and* the cost of redemption that Jesus paid.

I wonder if it's easier for someone who has converted to Christianity from another religion to be whole-hearted in their faith. Maybe we don't have the same challenges. We can be lulled into a false sense of security living in the west. But as our culture becomes more and more secularised we will become more and more marginalised and need to be able to stand up for what we believe to be the treasure which demands our all.

I'm always challenged by the story of the Indian from Assam whose family was the only one in his village to become Christian in response to hearing the gospel. His faith proved contagious and many villagers turned to Christ. The angry Chief summoned all the villagers and ordered the man and his family to recant or face execution. Moved by the Spirit the man said, "I have decided to follow Jesus". Enraged, the Chief ordered the execution of the man's two sons. As they died the chief asked, 'Now will you deny your faith before you lose your wife as well?' but the man replied, "Though no one joins me, I still will follow". At that the chief ordered the wife's execution. The chief gave the man one more chance to deny his faith and live, but he said, "The cross before me, the world behind me, no turning back". At this the chief ordered his death.

These deaths were not the end of the story. The Chief was so impressed by the man's unwavering faith that he too accepted Christ along with the whole village. And so the song 'I have decided to follow Jesus' was written.

I have decided to follow Jesus  
No turning back, no turning back

Though none go with me I still will follow  
No turning back, no turning back

The world behind me, the cross before me  
No turning back, no turning back

We are going to watch a video about a couple who were also willing to die  
for their faith.

Video (from Open Doors): Taher and Donya

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