

## The Parables of Jesus: Stories About Treasure Sunday, 7/14/19

**1** Parables are the stories Jesus made up to teach us timeless, eternal spiritual truths using every objects and situations that we can all relate to. Some of the situations Jesus described 2,000 years ago can feel a little distant to our modern ears, but still Jesus has things to teach us through the parables. I believe one of the reasons Jesus taught in parables is because when we later see those same situations happening in our lives, we might remember the parable and its lesson. As we heard last week, that very thing happened to Rita Varner-Otness with the Parable of the Sower. In a couple of weeks, we'll hear a humorous real-life account of the Parable of the Weeds from Mike Knutson. I can think of at least a couple of times in my own life when I've recognized one of the parables of Jesus coming true in surprising ways. How about you? As we explore the parables of Jesus this summer, it's not too late to share your story with me!

**2** This morning we heard two parables involving money and other valuables: a pearl of great value and another unspecified treasure. Parables can be tricky to interpret, especially the short ones, because we have a tendency to make assumptions about the precise meaning of the parable without letting the Bible speak for itself, and so we miss the spiritual truth that Jesus intends that we learn. One thing that I find helpful is to establish what a parable doesn't mean. For example, both of these parables tell of a man holding an extreme garage sale, selling everything he owned, so that he could buy something of great value. It would be a mistake of the most tragic kind to presume that by these parables Jesus intends to teach us that for the right price, anything is for sale, even the Kingdom of Heaven! Similarly, I think we would all go away sad, like the Rich Young Ruler,<sup>1</sup> if we thought this parable taught that in order to get into the Kingdom of Heaven, we have to sell everything we have.

It would also be a mistake to assume that since these parables teach spiritual truths, they have nothing whatsoever to do with our attitudes and practices around money and the things money can represent. Even though Jesus often contrasted earthly and heavenly things for the purpose of teaching, he also very clearly understood and taught that God's plan is for our physical lives and spiritual lives to be joined in the perfect harmony that he describes as

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 10:17-22

the Kingdom of Heaven. That's part of why he bothered to heal the sick and feed the hungry. The Biblical view of eternity is not that we're abandoning the physical for the spiritual, but that we're journeying toward the day when they'll be perfectly joined in the recreation of heaven and earth, the way they were always intended to be. And that means that our attitudes and actions concerning even simple things like money are inextricably linked to the spiritual reality of the coming reign of God.

**3** When I hear the parable of the buried treasure, my first thought is of a pirate's treasure map, where "x marks the spot" of the buried treasure. Apparently ordinary people, and not just pirates, really did (and still do) bury things as a way to keep them safe. In 2004 a California couple out for a walk through their property discovered 1,400 19<sup>th</sup> Century gold coins worth 10 million dollars buried in rusty cans!<sup>2</sup> But in the parable, the man was walking on someone else's property. Perhaps what Jesus had in mind was a worker in a field discovering a chest of valuables that had been buried and abandoned by a previous owner. It's hard not to read into this parable our modern notions of property rights, imagining that Jesus is encouraging us to defraud our employers of their property. I suggest that simply carrying off the treasure would have been the easier and more dishonest course of action for the finder rather than burying the treasure and then buying the field! Since this parable obviously parallels the one that follows it, the simplest way to interpret it is to pay attention to what seems to be the main point of both parables: The Kingdom of Heaven is costly, but worth trading everything we have for it. Let's compare that interpretation with another teaching from Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. I'm reading from Matthew 6, verses 19-21 in the New Living Translation [{Read Bible}](#)

**4** Can any of the car buffs here identify this car buried in the sand? It's a 1964 Pontiac Bonneville station wagon. I like to think of cars when I hear that teaching about rusty treasures. There's a rusted-out car mostly buried in dirt that's barely visible along a narrow dirt walking trail near the beginning of the Gunflint Trail in northern Minnesota. I really wonder how it got there! Sometimes old cars can be restored with great cost and effort, but most cars are not. Cars are emblematic of this teaching of Jesus. They look so shiny and

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<sup>2</sup> <https://thejewelblog.wordpress.com/2014/02/27/eureka-california-couple-discovers-rusty-cans-packed-with-10-million-in-gold-rush-era-coins/>

perfect on the car lot, but most cars swiftly depreciate in value, until eventually they're not safe to drive anymore.

The key to understanding this parabolic teaching is in verse 21: "Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be." Jesus isn't insisting that we not buy cars anymore than he's insisting we sell everything we have. Jesus wants our hearts, and what we invest our time, attention, and money in is a pretty sure indication of where our hearts are.

How about you? What are the rusted-out, moth-eaten earthly treasures that you're giving your heart to? In the parables of the buried treasure and the pearl of great value, Jesus is making the point that the Kingdom life he's inviting us to enjoy is worth immeasurably more than all of the treasures we spend our life accumulating, insuring, refurbishing, and idolizing.

**5** We're going to watch a creative adaptation of the Parable of the Pearl now. As you watch it, I want you to pay particular attention to the attitude of the pearl buyer. What do you suppose is going on in his head and heart as he stands there in the jewelry store? {[Play DVD: The Pearl, 2:34](#)}

**6** Did you notice the man's captivation and wonder upon seeing the pearl? I cut out the middle portion of the video for economy of time, but what you would have seen was the man considering each of the many things he possessed (his home, his cabin, his car, his retirement- even the lunch money in his pocket), systematically weighing them against the value of the pearl, and then coming to the joyful realization that as nice as all those things were, the pearl was more valuable than all of them. When was the last time you felt that way about something, something that completely held your attention with joy and wonder; something you felt you simply had to have, regardless of the cost? Was it a new love interest? Was it a new phone? Was it a car? A place to live? Now when was the last time you felt that way about Jesus and this crazy mission of his to bring heaven to earth? Following Jesus was never meant to be about the rituals and routines, it was meant to be a joyful journey of discovery.

What do you suppose this man did when he left the jewelry shop. Do you suppose he went and buried the pearl and kept the secret to himself? Hardly! I think he couldn't help but

show that pearl and tell his story to everyone he could find. This isn't a parable about evangelism, but I think that it reveals the heart of what evangelism is all about. As we begin to grasp the joy and wonder of the treasure we have in God's Kingdom, when we begin to value it beyond the stuff we accumulate and worship, the story of our lives will begin to share that joy with others and the kingdom will be one day closer to coming.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a buried treasure or a pearl. God is holding it out to you, eagerly desiring that you have it. What treasures are you holding tightly to that you need to let go of in order to receive the Kingdom more fully today?



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