

"BURIED TREASURE"

Matthew 13:44-46
Colossians 2:2-3

June 27, 2010
Fairfield Presbyterian Church

INTRODUCTION

I want to read/sing to you a famous line from a sea shanty in one of the all-time great adventure novels. See if you recognize it:

*"15 men on a dead man's chest—
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!"*

In this story young Jim and Squire Trelawney and the good doctor join Long John Silver and a bunch of scoundrels and they set sail for Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. The story has it all: a treasure map and on the map "x" marks the spot and the spot leads to buried treasure—Spanish doubloons and gold bullion—
An enormous treasure plundered and hidden away by pirates!

I rather like treasure stories, do you? Like treasures of the **tomb** (Egyptian and Mayan); on one of my first trips to Belize I saw ancient items that the local Mayans had unearthed. Or maybe you prefer stories of sunken **ships** with treasure. I had a college Bible professor who spent his summers in Israel on **archaeological** digs. And I read yesterday that looting archaeological "treasure sites" is again in a problem in war-torn Iraq.

And there are lesser treasures that may captivate you and me. Catching a trophy fish, finding that particular baseball card or that **out-of-print book**, buying and restoring a classic car, or stumbling upon a desired piece of antique furniture—what stirs you to seek and to find and to delight in the discovery?

Two things are necessary for gaining a treasure: **First**, the treasure must exist; it must be real. **Second**, you must discover it, accidentally or on purpose; then with ease or difficulty you acquire it.

That brings us to our text: **two parables** from **Matthew 13**. A *treasure* in a field and the *pearl* of great price. These stories are similar and should be interpreted together—they are **twins**. Can you recall another set of twins—twin parables? Mustard seed and leaven. We will study them on another Sunday. But these twin parables also are *different*—they are not identical. In the first story a man stumbles upon a treasure hidden in a field. But in the second parable a merchant deliberately searches for a valuable pearl.

A man is plowing a field and finds a **hidden jar**. Burying your valuables was an ancient way of preserving the treasure from thieves and fires.

Example: hidden communion-ware in Romania—the Hungarian Reformed Church

In the parable the first man likely is a **day-laborer**. And he knows the laws of the land. If he lifts the treasure out of the ground and looks it over, he must turn it over to the land-owner. But if he doesn't "**lift it**" he may go and sell all, in order to make an attempt to buy the field and then claim the treasure he discovered.

The second character is a **merchant** is searching for good pearls. He knows the quality of pearls by looking and touching. One day he finds an **extraordinary pearl**, the mother of all pearls. It is worth is more than all others. He quickly sells all his assets in order to purchase this one-of-a-kind pearl (pearl market).

Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God is **like** these two stories. **How** is it **like** these parables? In both stories something of great value is discovered and somebody sells all to gain the desired treasure.

The kingdom of God refers to God's rule. Where God rules, He is King and Master; He calls the shots, He wields the greatest influence. That's mostly what Jesus preached about, his **Father's kingdom**:

-He referred to the Father. .	"My Father's house"
-he deferred to his Father..	"not my will but Thine.."
-he conferred with the Father. .	"Our Father who art..."
-he preferred credit given to the Father. .	"glorify my Father in heaven"

To Jesus nothing is more valuable than knowing and loving God. Life is a gift from God and is best lived on divine terms--even if God requires of *you* some kind of sacrifice. Do you suppose Jesus had in mind his own upcoming ordeal on the cross as the price he would pay to usher in the kingdom? Was selling all for the pearl of great price a clue pointing to the cross of Calvary?

There's no mistaking that the stories end the same way. With the treasure in view, both the worker and the merchant sacrifice everything in order to obtain the valued item. What do these examples mean for us? Are these stories intended as calls to **radical discipleship**? Are we really supposed to give up everything for a place in the kingdom? I'm reminded of the story of the rich, young ruler? Do you remember him?

Jesus told him to sell all and he went away sorrowful for he had many possessions. He was not able to make the sacrifice, right? It was too costly. The price was too high. But now I want you to notice something in these stories that I have not mentioned yet. In fact I have deliberately suggested the opposite. In these little parables the word **sacrifice** actually does not appear—does it?

These story-pictures are not about somebody giving up something for nothing or even something for a lesser item. Both the worker and the merchant give up what they have in order to gain more. Don't they?

And what is the mood or demeanor of these men after they each discover the treasure? Matthew tells us explicitly in the first case. "*And carried away by his joy he goes and sells...*" Do you see that? The leading point in each parable is **joy** upon discovery. You might say that joy is the engine of sacrifice except we now know that the selling was not necessarily sacrificial but was a means to great gain.

C. S. Lewis, who often saw and articulated the big picture so well, titled his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*. The reference is not to Joy Gresham whom he married late in life. It was an allusion to Lewis' discovery of joy in the Lord and peace in God's kingdom. The big idea in the

parables is the joy of the gospel. It is the joy of discovering Jesus Christ in whom are hid, in Paul's words, "*all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*" Cf. Colossians 2.

Suppose you had the opportunity to acquire a winning lottery ticket worth \$20 million. It was placed in an empty house currently on the real estate market for \$500,000. To buy that house you must sell yours and more besides. But you stand to gain 19 plus million. That's a good **investment**, isn't it?

Everyone who purchases something considers to some degree, its **price**, its **cost**, and its **value—and its worth**.

Price is a selling term. It's the amount a person is willing to sell an article for. Cost is a buying term. It's the amount the buyer actually pays. Value is an abstract term that relates the object to a standard, i.e. "fair market value." And worth I define as entirely subjective. What's it *worth* to you? Family pictures have little *value* on the market but may be *worth* a great deal to you.

Both the treasure and the pearl had great **value**. In the story each represented infinite value at a finite cost. How could you go wrong investing in the treasure or the pearl?

Jesus wants to teach us a valuable lesson from these parables. The kingdom of God is worth more than any other treasure or experience. Knowing God and enjoying Him forever is of supreme value. So whatever you must give up to make God first in your life--it's a bargain! As we have heard elsewhere, "*Seek first the Kingdom and his righteousness—and all these things shall be added unto you.*"

Blaise Pascal, the French mathematician, made the same point in the mid 1600's.

Pascal, the brilliant maker of calculators and purveyor of philosophy, framed what is now called **Pascal's wager**. He said, "*Either God is or he is not.* We cannot prove He exists or that He does not exist. Because our reason is limited, he said, "*Reason cannot decide this question.*" So Pascal asks, "**how will you wager?**" In the living of your life are you betting that God exists or are you betting that He does not? How will you wager?

Pascal says you should consider *probability*, *payoff* and *cost* in determining the expected value. Is it probable God exists? What is the payoff if he does or does not exist? What is the cost of believing or not believing? Pascal claimed that betting on God promises the greater **expected value**. That heaven is a better value than hell, no matter what the cost.

For me, the deciding bit of evidence is the **resurrection**. Dying on the cross Jesus paid for my forgiveness. But rising from the dead he secured for me eternal life—his new life he offers to those who trust in Him. (**payoff!**)

Do you believe this? Not everyone does. Some complain that the four gospels disagree in the details of Easter morning. To me, that actually bolsters belief. Each witness remembered the same story but just a little differently.

Can we believe this amazing story on the authority of apostles and other witnesses? That's how we believe every other kind of fact. Did you ever meet George Washington or Thomas Jefferson

or Amelia Earhart? How do you know they existed? You take it as true on the authority of historians.

Have you ever seen Saturn or Pluto or a proton or an electron? Or electricity or radio waves? We accept many things on the authority of scientists as eyewitnesses.

We learn to believe from experience and we believe and act on the authority of those we trust.

And we invest in that which promises the greater expected value. Do you see your service to God as a kind of investment? Do you see your financial giving to God's work as an investment in the Kingdom you are seeking?

Preachers face a universal temptation to exhort people to live fully in the joy of the kingdom and to serve faithfully in the company of God's people. We sometimes think our job is to tell people to give more time and more money to the church, to pray more, to be more dedicated, to act more loving and even to be more joyful...

All such exhortations are forms of the law however we say them in the religious or pious language of our day and culture. And God's law expresses truths.

But the law by itself always kills, and congregations will simply wilt if the preacher subjects them to a crushing burden of must, must, shall, shall, don't, don't, do, do, more, more! This is why everyone needs a season of hearing the stories of Jesus before his commands, joy before sacrifice, discovery before decisions, gospel before law and beatitudes before commandments.

In our little parables, the joy of discovery precedes the selling of everything. And no person tells the farmer or the merchant to sell. The treasure tells all. The joy motivates these disciples. A decisive selling of everything did follow, of course, and this is the other half of the story. For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross. For the joy of the treasure a drastic selling took place. But notice again that neither man is pictured as giving up something or losing something. The motivator is the overwhelming joy of a splendid discovery.

Becoming a convert or disciple or follower of Jesus is a life-changing **discovery of joy**. And living the Christian life as a steward of God's grace is doing what it takes to acquire and possess the treasure. But seek the joy first. Wake up and sense the joy. See it, hear it, taste it. Let it capture you. Let it order your life.

There is *another* way to read these parables. It has been suggested that the worker/merchant could be seen as God. God is seeking after people who will accept his love. And when he finds such a person, such a treasure--He is willing "**to sacrifice**" everything to bring them into the kingdom.

Whether these stories are about people seeking God or God seeking people, one thing remains constant. It is **Jesus** who brings people and God together. The risen Lord is the door into the kingdom. Faith in Him unlocks and opens that door. Jesus is the **buried treasure—who rose again**. "X", the ancient symbol for Christ, *does mark the spot* where you find the treasure of infinite value.

Story: Zinzendorf's scrap of paper (James Stewart, *King Forever*, p. 84)

Once *you* hear the call of Christ, *you* cannot blot it out of your mind. The paper won't burn. It has your name on it and Christ's and it is the Spirit of God that has joined these names together— forever....

**"O let me in thy nail-prints see,
My calling and election free--"**