

THE GOSPEL AS TREASURE

(Matthew 13:33-46; 2 Corinthians 4:7)

Recently we've started going through a series on Good News - and our focus this morning is on the Gospel as treasure - how it's a treasure that we receive, but also a treasure we are to share. David Wilson says: *"[To accumulate] spiritual riches and not [share] them with others is as obscene as accumulating financial riches and keeping them for ourselves."*

We know too that Jesus says: *"Freely you have received, now freely give,"* (Matt 10:8). And so if we truly believe that the gospel is the greatest news of all time, we'll want to share it. If you've tasted and seen that the Lord is good, and you've experienced his love, his goodness, and mercy in your life, then you should have a desire to share that. But here's the problem: So often we tend to limit the Good News by making it into something that's just believed, something that exists only to benefit us. And so to us it's good, but just not good enough to share.

During my final year at university I ended up staying with a friend who I studied with. And I stayed with him in his family home for 8 months, completely rent free. Though both his parents taught religious studies, none of them had a relationship with Jesus... At that time, God kept prompting me to share the gospel with them, but the thing was that I was too afraid. I kept thinking about how kind and generous they were in letting me stay. I thought I owed them, and I dreaded the thought of possibly offending them... And so I kept ignoring all the prompts I was receiving from the Holy Spirit, until one particular day, when I was in the kitchen reading my Bible. My friend walked in, and God pointed me to 1 Corinthians 9:16. It says, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" I felt so convicted! So you see, for me, at that time, the gospel was good, but not good enough to share... It took me over 8 months to actually do it. That was me... Then there are certain people like George Whitfield, for whom the Gospel is just too good not to share. Whitfield says: God forbid that I should travel with anybody a quarter of an hour without speaking of Christ to them."

So my hope and prayer for this morning is that we'll remember that the gospel does not only exist to benefit us, but that we exist for the gospel. And that as we gain a greater understanding of just how precious the good news is that we've received, that God's Spirit will grow in us a greater desire to share it.

We have a couple of passages this morning and i'd like to take us through them with the two following headings. "A Treasure Received" and "A Treasure Shared."

A Treasure Received

This is Matthew 13:44-46.

Jesus says: *"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. "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."*

To give a bit of context, in Matthew chapter 13, Jesus is teaching about the kingdom through the use of parables. There are 7 in total - the first 4 he tells to the crowds. Then the remaining three, including the ones we are looking at today, he tells only to the disciples. But one thing we need to bear in mind when going through these parables is that whenever the "kingdom of heaven" is mentioned in Matthew, it's going to be connected with the good news. We see this connection being made explicitly throughout the gospel account. In Matthew 4:23, it says that "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom..." Chapter 9:35, "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues [and] proclaiming the good news of the kingdom." Chapter 24:14, Jesus say: "...this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world..." And actually even earlier in chapter 13, when explaining the parable of the sower, Jesus says that the seed represent the message of the kingdom - which again, is the gospel. So as we go through these parables, it'll be important for us to keep this in mind.

But going back to vv. 44-46, we see Jesus describe the kingdom of heaven as a hidden treasure and a pearl of great price, and the lesson that Jesus is teaching is that the kingdom of heaven has inestimable worth. Both the man and the merchant, once they realise the great value of the treasure, are willing to joyfully sell everything they had, in order to buy it... And so what do the treasure and the pearl represent? We're told that they represent the kingdom. The gospel. They represent Jesus and the salvation he offers, and a loving relationship with the God who created us. Jesus uses these parables to emphasise the supreme value of the kingdom - and actually before I go any further, I just want to quickly stress what these parables are not saying. They are not saying that we need to earn our salvation. Neither are they saying that we need to pay our way into the kingdom by selling stuff - it's not about that! And we can be sure of this because we know that we are saved by grace through faith. It can never be through our

works or what we do because salvation is of the Lord - it's a work of God from beginning to end, and there's nothing that we contribute. In fact, it's been said that the only thing we do contribute to our salvation is the sin that makes it necessary. And so these parables have nothing to do with salvation by works or selling stuff, but they tell us just how precious the kingdom of heaven is, and they are there encourage us to treasure the kingdom above all else.

So as you come to church this morning, how good is the good news to you? How precious is it to you? Does the fact that we are all sinners who've been saved by grace still amaze you and fill you with joy, or is it something that you've started to take for granted, something that you've heard too often that's become a bit common, maybe even boring?

For those of us who are a part of God's kingdom, we've already received the greatest treasure. It's important that we understand this. It's important that we believe it, and it's important for the way that we live our lives to demonstrate what we believe to be true.

To look at this from another perspective, listen to what Paul says in Philippians 3:7-8. This is the Amplified Version. Paul says: *"But whatever former things were gains to me... these things I have come to consider as loss [absolutely worthless] for the sake of Christ... but more than that, I count everything as loss compared to the priceless privilege and supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord [and of growing more deeply and thoroughly acquainted with Him - a joy unequaled]. For His sake I have lost everything, and consider it all garbage, so that I may gain Christ."*

That's some pretty strong language that Paul's using, right? "I consider everything as garbage, so that I may gain Christ." Some translations use the word "dung," but even that is still quite polite compared to the actual Greek word that Paul uses, which is a stronger and more offensive word for faeces. It's a rude word, but he uses it to make the point that compared to knowing Jesus, everything else is absolutely worthless... As it says in Matthew 16:26, "What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet lose their soul. The fact of the matter is that without Jesus we have nothing, but if we have him, we have everything - and that's why the kingdom of heaven is our greatest treasure...

Dodson and Watson write that, *"By faith, Jesus' death and resurrection can become your death and resurrection, releasing you to live a truly human life. Best of all, when we turn away from trusting our unreliable selves and turn to the reliable, resurrected Christ, we gain intimacy with the most beautiful, powerful, creative, and gracious Person the world will ever know."*

Life with Jesus is better. He offers deeper joy, more profound meaning, and true purpose. Life with Jesus is truer. He is the one person we were made for. If you join Jesus, you will join the Person who changes everything, even us.

Brothers and sisters, that's what we've already received - Christ and his glorious gospel. And once we've found the pearl of great price, that hidden treasure, we count everything as loss and we take hold of it. But it doesn't stop there, because if the gospel is true, then it matters to everyone. If it's true, then it isn't bound or limited in any way. It has been relevant and will always be relevant, not only to you, but for every person in this world whether they know it or not. Which takes us to our second point.

A Treasure Shared

2 Corinthians 4:7, *"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."*

Again the word "treasure" refers to the good news. But here it says that this treasure has been placed in jars of clay - and that's us.

Now jars are created to serve a purpose and they come in all shapes and sizes. But here's the thing: jars are also fragile. They can be broken. We can suffer from physical illness... We can suffer from mental illness. There can be times when we are emotionally unstable. Times where we feel barely functional. We can get hurt easily. We can be afraid. We can feel tired, depressed, anxious, stressed, nervous... you name it! Yet it is according to the wisdom and purpose of God that He allows weak and fragile jars to carry something so precious. Why? Well, because it isn't for our sake, but for His glory. *"...to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."*

Now let me illustrate this. Here is a beautiful bag. As I'm holding it, your attention is more than likely to be on the bag, rather than on its content. And so actually what you've missed is that inside this bag is the finest bottle of Tawny Port that money can buy - it's Waitrose, aged 20 years! Because you were so focused on the bag, you missed the treasure. But look what happens when this bottle is placed within a plain bag, one that isn't quite so eye catching. Now your attention is no longer on the bag, but on the treasure... And so this is the way for the treasure to be seen and the power shown - that all-surpassing power that is from God.

It's for this reason that God has chosen to put His treasure in jars of clay. Because it isn't about us, it's about Him. We've been called to make much of God... to echo the words of John the Baptist, when he says that Jesus *"...must*

become greater and greater, and I must become less and less," (John 3:30). We've been called to share this treasure... You see, we haven't been made to be mere storage containers, but to be containers that first receive and then pour out. God wants to work in us, yes, but He also wants to work through us - and He's not afraid or embarrassed to use jars of clay like you and me to display His glory. It's just that often we're afraid and embarrassed to represent Him - our God. And I get that, because it happens to me. But I believe it's during those times that we need to remind ourselves that it's not about us, but about Him. The key is to focus not on the jars of clay, not on ourselves, but on the treasure! And we need to understand just how precious this treasure is. I want to be so focused on God, so captured by His love, and so lost in wonder and amazement at His gospel, that fear just melts away... I forget to be afraid. I forget to be embarrassed. I no longer care if I look like a fool or stumble over my words, because even if I do, it's worth it. Because this treasure is worth it. The good news is worth it. And maybe it's during the times when we step out and make ourselves vulnerable that we are then able to operate out of an overflow of God's love and power. When we get to that point where we truly realise that it's no longer about us, or our reputation, but about God, about His Gospel, and for His glory.

So, how good is the good news to you today? Is it good enough to share? Are you willing to be used by God just as you are - as a jar of clay that carries the greatest treasure that there is?

I'll finish with Galatians 2:20. It says: *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live [it's no longer you, it's no longer me. It's no longer Yein who lives], but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh [in this earthly vessel, this jar of clay] I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*