

Christ Community Covenant Church
A Stewardship of Life: The Case of the Buried Treasure
Pastor Dave Scherrer - October 7, 2012

When I was a kid I liked mystery books. I had probably 25 Hardy Boy mystery books that my mom probably tossed out when I left for college. I liked stories about buried treasure and sunken ships. For a while I wanted to be an archeologist because I thought it would be fun to find buried treasures. Turns out they mostly find broken kitchen utensils but still it sounded like fun for me. Buried treasure.

I wanted to show you a little story of a modern buried treasure. Let's watch this clip. A realtor has discovered that an old worthless piece of land has oil on it. He asks an industrial scientist to confirm his find and then he has a decision to make!:

[VIDEO]

You probably recognize this story, even in its modern setting. It is the story of the Kingdom parable that Jesus told. Parables are teachings about heaven, told in an earthy manner. This very short parable is found in Matthew 13:

Matthew 13:44 (ESV)

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

And you may be wondering what this has to do with Life Stewardship but I think it is everything to do with being a expert steward of life.

So we have a modern day mystery, what is this "case of the buried treasure"? Is there a hidden meaning behind it? Is it code for another message altogether? What exactly is going on here?

Let me start by saying this about Jesus' teachings. He did not always make things perfectly clear. Sometimes he did. Statements like, "Go and sin no more" which he said to the women caught in adultery seems clear enough. And you are a "whitewashed tombstone over a grave of decaying matter" that he called the Pharisees seems clear enough. But this little story is filled with truth that only those who have ears to hear and eyes to see can understand. And actually, for a man who was God, he told the truths of God in very cloaked terms. He actually said to his disciples when they asked why he taught so mysteriously:

"To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,

'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.' But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it" (Matthew 13:10-17).

Life Stewardship. Really?

As we shall see over the next several weeks God is asking us to take care of His stuff. Everything you see and everything you can't see is God's stuff, including you. And he wants us to take care of it. All of it, even you. He gave us instructions on how to go about this. He gave us working orders founded in His character of Love:

Deuteronomy 6:5

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

These simple instructions are all that are needed to take care of His stuff. Including you. It should be easy but it is not. God's stuff has fallen out of fellowship with the perfect themes and essential harmonies of God. Including you. Our little planet, what CS Lewis called "The Silent Planet," is out of fellowship with the will and way of God, creating a spiritual black hole of sorts. The account of our fall from the arms of God is famous. Genesis 3. He meant this planet to be the perfect home of His creative magnum opus; humankind. But 'The Fall' has left us desperately searching; searching for God and His Kingdom and the peace and love that it is to be in the center of God. And now we ask ourselves the question, Will we know the treasure when we see it? The fall has covered everything in a greasy silt of black sin, and the good things and the bad all look surprisingly the same.

The Kingdom of Heaven

And the story is actually a very commonplace kind of story. It would have not been uncommon for people in Jesus' time to bury family heirlooms and treasure. There were not secure places available to common folk, and in times of war or raids or because of fear of burglary, it would not have been uncommon to bury family heirlooms and treasures.

Jesus tells this parable precisely to counter the disciples' expectations about the kingdom. The disciples expected the kingdom to be obviously valuable to everyone and profoundly Jewish in nature. In fact in many ways the Hebrew nation thought they already had all there was of the Kingdom of God. They were just waiting for the Messiah to release it again to them. But Jesus talked differently about the Kingdom of God right from the beginning.

Now listen to the parable as Jesus tells it. The kingdom is like a treasure hidden in a field. And a certain man unexpectedly comes upon it while he's digging and he sells everything that he has in order to buy it. Jesus, in this parable, indicates that the treasure is hidden to many. Not all will see the value of the kingdom of heaven. Not even all those in Israel will see the value of the kingdom of heaven.

Notice three aspects to the story:

1. First of all, the treasure is hidden. It is not openly displayed for all. Not all see the value of the treasure.
2. Secondly, notice that the treasure is found unexpectedly. This man was not in the field digging for treasure. He was digging for something else. Perhaps he was plowing this rented field. And he stumbles upon this treasure. So he wasn't even looking for it when he found it.
3. And finally, notice this treasure is worth everything. Jesus indicates that there is nothing in this man's life that can match the value of the treasure which he has found. And so this parable shows the incalculable preciousness of salvation for those who discover it and obtain possession of it without ever even looking for it. This parable reminds us of the exceeding preciousness of the kingdom, even if the world doesn't value the kingdom in that way.

Here is the point of this little story for the disciples and for us, also his disciples. His parable can serve as a diagnostic for our hearts. We have to ask ourselves this question: "What is the kingdom worth to us? Is the kingdom my priority?" Because our estimation of the worth of the kingdom tells us whether we are in the kingdom or not. It is the most primary life stewardship question known to humankind because the answer to it has everything to do with our lives. If we do not value the kingdom as the greatest treasure, if we do not value the saving eternal relationship with Jesus Christ above all else, then we have cast our lot with those who do not have the treasure, because that is the treasure, and it is worth losing everything else to obtain.

J.I. Packer in a famous book called *Knowing God*, in the second chapter, he tells the story of a colleague who, because of his commitment to Christ and Christian principles had lost any possibility of advancing through the British university system to a higher level as a professor. Others were promoted and lesser scholars rewarded financially. Packer tells the story of walking with him in the woods one day, and he asked his friend whether he ever regretted the choice he made, and whether he resented what had happened to him. And his friend's response was simply this:

‘I have known Jesus Christ and they have not.’

He was happy to have foregone the loss of an advancement of a career because he knew Christ. Giving ourselves to the Lord has consequences. At least it does if we do it fully and whole heartedly. So that makes us ask a question: “Do we need to raise the bar when it comes to giving ourselves to God?”

Giving ourselves to the Lord: Raising the bar!

Can I say something about Jesus that strikes me as odd? Sometimes it seems to me that Jesus is not making it easy for us. For instance, teaching about the Kingdom of God, the most important thing in the world, in mysterious parables. Jesus, if you want us to know you, why be so indirect?

But it gets worse. The things that confuse me don’t trouble me nearly as much as the things that are crystal clear. Jesus seems to demand the unthinkable. When surrounded by a crowd of eager followers, Jesus turned to them and remarked, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple.” Imagine hearing those words from an obscure Jewish teacher in the first century. He just lost most of us at *hello*. But then he continued: “Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” Now this is taking it to another level. *Pick up an instrument of torture and follow me.* This is getting plain weird...and kind of creepy. Imagine a leader coming on the scene today and inviting all who would come after him to pick up an electric chair and become his disciple. Any takers? As if this were not enough, Jesus finished his seeker-sensitive plea with a pull-at-your-heartstrings conclusion. “Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” Give up everything you have, carry a cross, and hate your family. This sounds a lot different than “Confess your sins and let Jesus into your heart, done deal.”

Consider Mark 10, another time a potential follower showed up. Here was a guy who was young, rich, intelligent, and influential. He was a prime prospect, to say the least. Not only that, but he was eager and ready to go. He came running up to Jesus, bowed at his feet, and said, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Matthew 19:16-26 (ESV)

And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”¹⁷ And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The young man said to him, “All these I have kept. What do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”²² When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

[And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”]

If I were in Jesus’ shoes, I probably would be thinking this is our chance. A simple “Pray this prayer, sign this card, bow your head, and repeat after me” and this guy is in. Then think about what a guy like this with all his influence and prestige can do. We can get him on the circuit. He can start sharing his testimony, signing books, raising money for the cause. This one is a no-brainer – we have to get him in. Unfortunately, Jesus didn’t have the personal evangelism books we have today that tell us how to draw the net and close the sale. Instead Jesus told him one thing: “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

What was he thinking? The cost was too high. Yet the kind of abandonment Jesus asked of the rich young man is at the core of Jesus’ invitation throughout the Gospels. Even his simple call in Matthew 4 to

his disciples – “Follow me” – contained radical implications for their lives. Jesus was calling them to abandon their comforts, all that was familiar to them and natural for them.

He was calling them to abandon their careers. They were reorienting their entire life's work around discipleship to Jesus. Their plans and dreams were now being swallowed up by his.

Jesus was calling them to abandon their possessions. “Drop your nets and your trades as successful fishermen,” he was saying in effect.

Ultimately, Jesus was calling them to abandon themselves. They were leaving certainty for uncertainty, safety for danger, self-preservation for self-denunciation. In a world that prizes promoting oneself, they were following a teacher who told them to crucify themselves. And history tells us the result. Almost all of them would lose their lives because they responded to his invitation.

What about us?

Let's put ourselves in the shoes of these eager followers of Jesus in the first century. What if I were the potential disciple being told to drop my nets? What if you were the man whom Jesus told to not even say good-bye to his family? What if we were told to hate our families and give up everything we had in order to follow Jesus?

This is where we come face to face with a dangerous reality. We *do* have to give up everything we have to follow Jesus. We *do* have to love him in a way that makes our closest relationships in this world look like hate. And it is entirely possible that he *will* tell us to sell everything we have and give it to the poor.

But we don't want to believe it. We are afraid of what it might mean for our lives. So we rationalize these passages away. “Jesus wouldn't really tell us not to bury our father or say good-bye to our family. Jesus didn't literally mean to sell all we have and give it to the poor. What Jesus really meant was...”

And this is where we need to pause. Because we are starting to redefine Christianity. We are giving in to the dangerous temptation to take the Jesus of the Bible and twist him into a version of Jesus we are more comfortable with. In David Platt's very important book *Radical* he notes that we want to take Jesus literally when he says, “Come to me for my way is easy and my burden is light” but when he says, “You will have give up everything to follow me” that must be allegory.

Too often we have turned Jesus into a middle-class, American Jesus. A Jesus who doesn't mind materialism and who would never call us to give away everything we have. A Jesus who would not expect us to forsake our closest relationships so that he receives all our affection. A Jesus who is fine with nominal devotion that does not infringe on our comforts, because, after all, he loves us just the way we are. A Jesus who wants us to be balanced, who wants us to avoid dangerous extremes, and who, for that matter, wants us to avoid danger altogether. A Jesus who brings us comfort and prosperity as we live out our Christian spin on the American dream.

But do you and I realize what we are doing at this point? We are molding Jesus into our image. He is beginning to look a lot like us because, after all, that is whom we are most comfortable with. And the danger now is that when we gather in our church buildings to sing and lift up our hands in worship, we may not actually be worshiping the Jesus of the Bible. Instead we may be worshiping ourselves.

David Platt tells this story in his *Radical* book about a Christian magazine he received:

On the left, one headline read, “First Baptist Church Celebrates New \$23 Million Building.” A lengthy article followed, celebrating the church's expensive new sanctuary. The exquisite marble, intricate design, and beautiful stained glass were all described in vivid detail.

On the right hand was a much smaller article. The headline for it read, “Baptist Relief Helps Sudanese Refugees.” Knowing I was about to go to Sudan, my attention was drawn. The article described how 350,000 refugees in western Sudan were dying of malnutrition and might not live to the end of the year. It

briefly explained their plight and sufferings. The last sentence said that Baptists had sent money to help relieve the suffering of the Sudanese. I was excited until I got to the amount.

Now, remember what was on the left: "First Baptist Church Celebrates New \$23 Million Building." On the right the article said, "Baptists have raised \$5,000 to send to refugees in western Sudan."

Five thousand dollars. Where have we gone wrong? How did we get to the place where this is actually tolerable? And remember, we are hoping to build a church soon!

Did you catch what Jesus said when he told the rich man to abandon his possessions and give to the poor? Listen again, particularly to the second half of Jesus' invitation: "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, **and you will have treasure in heaven.** If we are not careful, we can misconstrue these radical statements from Jesus in the Gospels and begin to think that he does not want the best for us. But he does. Jesus was not trying to strip this man of all his pleasure. Instead he was offering him the satisfaction of eternal treasure. Jesus was saying, "It will be better, not just for the poor, but for you too, when you abandon the stuff you are holding on to."

"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."

This is Life Stewardship. God is inviting us to abandon everything we have, but you are also gaining more than you could have in any other way. So with joy – with joy! – you sell it all, you abandon it all. Why? Because you have found something worth losing everything else for.

This is the picture of Jesus in the gospel. He is something – someone – worth losing everything for. And if we walk away from the Jesus of the gospel, we walk away from vast and immeasurable eternal riches. Have you ever dreamed of what you would do if you won the \$350 million lottery? If you are abiding in Christ and He in you, you already have it. Pressed down shaken together, beyond anything we could ask or think.

Here are two practical suggestions if you want to get this Life Stewardship issue settled.

Make a commitment to believe everything whatever Jesus says

As a Christian, it would be a grave mistake to come to Jesus and say, "Let me hear what you have to say, and then I'll decide whether or not I like it." If you approach Jesus this way, you will never truly hear what he has to say. You have to say yes to the words of Jesus before you even hear them.

Make a commitment to obey everything whatever Jesus says

The gospel does not prompt you to mere reflection; the gospel requires a response. In the process of hearing Jesus, you are compelled to take an honest look at your life, your family, and your church and not just ask, "What is he saying?" but also ask, "What shall I do?"

2 Corinthians 8: 5-6 (The Message)

This was totally spontaneous, entirely their own idea, and caught us completely off guard. What explains it was ***that they had first given themselves unreservedly to God*** and to us. The other giving simply flowed out of the purposes of God working in their lives.

Communion:

And then there is the other way of looking at our treasure in a field passage . . .