

Part 24: Kingdom Value and Kingdom Evaluation

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Happy Father's Day to everyone in here. Last night my wife and I were listening to a podcast which tried to convince us that the best gift to get dad for Father's Day is a new set of high priced underwear. They marketed it as "Something your man is guaranteed to love!" If you purchased something for your dad today because a marketing campaign told you he was "Guaranteed to love it," you've been duped.

I don't say this just because dads are hard to buy gifts for, I say this because even social sciences and economics say that is true. One professor of economics wrote a book trying to understand the way we come to value specific things, and listen to what he says:

"The social sciences (including business) simply do not have laws in the way that physics has...In other words, something is valuable only if someone is willing to pay for it. This blunt approach upsets many people because it implies that there may be no economic value in a beautiful sunset, an endangered species, or a wonderful work of art. But this definition of value is useful because it forces economists to observe real behavior, rather than trying to uncover hidden realities."

What does this mean? It means there is no single gift which will captivate the heart of all dads, because each dad values something different. Everyone values things differently. The author says that there may be realities which are universally perceived as valuable. The problem is that, as he calls them, they are "hidden realities." We don't know what is uniformly valuable. So what marketers have to look at instead is what people treat as valuable. How does their behavior tell us what is valuable?

If we see something as valuable, we will buy it. If we do not see it as valuable, we won't. Value is in the eye of the beholder. The result is a bunch of Facebook quizzes and data mining attempts to see what each individual desires and to sell that information marketers and pollsters. There is now a whole ecosystem of software and employees which exists to examine you and discern what it is you are looking for.

In the same way social scientists determine value based off of the patterns and purchases of consumers, so too is the world able to determine what the church values based off its patterns, proclamations and proclivities. What is it that we value, how do we know it is valuable, and what does it mean for us?

Can you imagine how much easier birthdays, anniversaries and even charity would be if each and every one of us valued the same things at the same level? Can you imagine how much more enjoyable and life giving your faith would be if you saw in it an infinite value? If that were true, the way in which you lived out your faith would be more consistent because it would be a fitting response to what it is you value.

In our text today Jesus is going to show us the infinite value of the Kingdom of God, but he is also going to press into what this value means for us. Knowing something as valuable is not substitute for treating something as valuable, and this is where Jesus is going to help us today.

Here is what we are going to see today in the book of Matthew: **The value of the Kingdom of God shapes our response to it, and our response to the Kingdom of God shapes us.** In short today we are going to three things: what rules our hearts, what judges our hearts, and what captivates our hearts.

As we do this we are also going to be finishing up Jesus' main section of preaching in parables. For the past three weeks in Matthew, Jesus has been using stories with hidden-theological meaning to teach us what the Kingdom of heaven is like. Just for review, when Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of heaven, he is talking about the kingdom of God.

And when we talk about the Kingdom of God we are talking about four things, and it just so happens that those four things all start with a "P" to make it easy to remember them by. The Kingdom of God is: **God's place where he fulfills all his promises to his people, and dwells with them in the fullness of his presence.** [God's place, God's promises, God's people, in God's presence] To put it another way, it is the all-encompassing benefit of the gospel.

This idea of God's kingdom isn't an abstract theory. Jesus gave us a command back in Matthew 6:33 saying, "Seek first the kingdom of God." The Kingdom of God is so important that it is commanded we seek it, and it is so important to Jesus that his parables all try to explain it.

In the past few weeks we have seen parables discussing the need for faith and the future judgment which will come. Now when I was growing up, these truths were common place to me. I understood them. But on their own they didn't captivate me. I knew I needed to believe, I knew that everyone who believed would ultimately be saved in live in heaven happily ever after, fully cleansed from sin. But it wasn't captivating, and maybe that is you today. Maybe it is through white knuckles and clenched teeth that you steer your way into church and evangelism.

But this is why Jesus adds a third collection of parables to the mix, a group of parables which display the value of this Kingdom. Let's look at the first two parables together: **Matthew 13:44-46.**

This is our first point today: **Our hearts are ruled by what we value.** That might seem like an odd way to put it: ruled by what we value. But what's interesting in each of these stories is that both men were bound to do exactly what they did.

They were completely free, but there was no choice in the matter for them. They both discovered something and the value and worth of the item they discovered became a ruling force in their hearts. They couldn't not, not be compelled to possess these treasures.

Let me give you an example. In Missoula the debate is between Big Dipper and Sweet Peaks. Big Dipper has more flavors than Sweet Peaks, and Sweet Peaks has a good number of flavors. But for me it doesn't matter. I'm going to get Salty Carmel. I can't not. You can blow up that menu to a thousand flavors, you can give me all the free samples you want. I could be completely free, even encouraged to try something else, but at the end of the night, I'm getting salty caramel.

I'm obligated to. Not contractually. Not forcefully. Not under duress. But joyfully. All of us are held captive to the object our hearts most desire. The problem for us is the same problem we talked about in the beginning: we do not value the same things, and often we value the wrong things. James says this: **James 4:1-3.**

Our passions are at war within us and this puts us at war with each other, and the implication of James' text here is also that it puts us at war with God. Jesus' parable provides a solution to this problem by calling us to be captivated by the object of greatest desire: the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

In this parable we see two men each encountering the Kingdom of God differently, but each responds with the same level of sacrifice.

In the parable of the treasure we see a man bumbling along in a field who just happens to discover a treasure. The ESV then says, "in his joy" or what the Greek could also mean, "for the joy," compelled by the promise of what could be his, he sold everything he had and bought that field.

This man was not searching for anything, but found something that forever changed him. In 1945, and engineer named Percy Spencer was working in a lab with megnetrons which were producing microwaves. Percy began to feel something warm in his pocket and realized that the candy bar in his pocket was melting.

Percy wondered if it had anything to do with the microwaves and experimented by grabbing some popcorn and placing it where he was standing. Soon popcorn was blasting out of the kernels, and so was born the idea of the microwave oven.

For some people this is the way in which the gospel of joy comes to rule in your heart. You were going through your life at your own pace, following your own desires, but then God gently and firmly began to melt your heart of stone.

This was true, at least in experience for C.S. Lewis. While he dabbled in religion and philosophy he looked back at the moment of his own conversion and said, **"And so the great Angler played His fish and I never dreamed that the hook was in my tongue."** In fact the chapter of his biography which describes his conversion is titled: "checkmate."

The God of the Kingdom has a way of interrupting our lives with the beauty of his gospel. And if we see it, it changes the whole course of our lives.

The second parable was less happenstance. Here we have a merchant, or what is literally a traveling wholesaler. He knew what he was looking for, he was looking for fine pearls. But what he found was one pearl which made all the other ones disposable. And he took it not to sell it, but to have it for his own.

Maybe there are people in here, who like the merchant think they know what it is they are looking for. They have tried religion before, they love having philosophical discussions, they want to have a view of the world which is not necessarily exclusive, but instead is the best of this fine pearl over here, mixed with this fine pearl over here. You consider yourself open minded, hungry for knowledge, or spiritual but not religious.

Or maybe, as this parable could also mean, there are people in here who see the gospel of the kingdom as some value. But it is a value which is find its utility in the lives of others and not in your own life. We deal in the gospel, but we have no desire to own it ourselves.

But again, what interrupts this story is the one pearl of great value. In these stories we see two different men, but it is not the men nor their contexts which are important because both stories are interrupted by the value of what they discovered.

Now in the context of these two short stories, everything makes sense. There is nothing fantastic about their responses, because we imagine that in the same circumstance we would do the same. Why? Because if we were so presented with such clarity a revealed object of such visible value our responses and or actions would be a fitting response to such a discovery.

If we see it as valuable, we will buy it.

But the problem is that for most of us this parable makes sense to us if we were the man in the field, or the merchant in the market, but is completely foreign to us as a believer in our world. We say things like: "the gospel is my treasure," but all the while we are still wandering without the same captivation the man in the story has. We would like to think that Jesus is our one great pearl, and yet we allow him to sit on our shelf amidst our other treasures.

But here lays the beauty of Jesus parables. The point of Jesus' parables is not that God gives us a treasure. There are many gods which promise to provide treasure to those who follow them. But it is only the God of the Bible who promises his people that he is our treasure.

You see it is only through the lens of God being our treasure that the responses of these men make any sense. They did not give most of what they had, they gave all that they had. Why? Why would they shortchange their ability to find other, greater, newer treasures? Because they realized that the value and worth of the one which they had been provided was the end of all their searching. It satisfied their greatest desires and their every needs.

If God himself were not our treasure, the commands to pick up our cross and follow him would be devastating. If God were not our treasure, parables like this feel less like encouragement and more like entrapment. Thomas Chalmers, an 18th century pastor said it this way: **The world is the all of a natural man. He has not a taste nor a desire, that does not point to something placed within the confines of its visible horizon. He loves nothing above it, and he cares for nothing beyond it; and to bid him love not the world, is to pass a sentence of expulsion on all that his heart loves.**

Perhaps you've felt this way before. Where to do all that the Bible says regarding spiritual growth, service, evangelism, and the removal of sin sounds like an imprisonment of your heart, your habits and your hope. This is because our hearts are ruled by what we love. But what if we loved something new. Chalmers goes on to say: **The love of the world cannot be expunged by a mere demonstration of the world's worthlessness. But may it not be supplanted by the love of that which is more worthy than itself?**

It is this worth that Jesus is now showing us in his gospel. Our passions are at war, our hearts desperate and paranoid, our affections set against other and God himself because we are separated from the relationship we were meant to have with him. We were made to enjoy God. That was the beauty of the Garden of Eden. He alone was the object to be enjoyed. He alone promised to satisfy and sustain Adam and Eve.

And Adam and Eve experienced that goodness. I want you to hear that. They experienced the full intimacy of God's relationship with them. They were God's people, in God's place, with God's presence under his promise. But when the Devil deceived them into thinking that there was something better, something of greater value than God, they acted on it. They saw it as valuable, and they bought it.

I know in this building today there are people who see these two parables and they say, "That's not my experience. I have not been struck by the gospel in such a way that I am willing to give up everything for it." And to you I say, "That's ok." Because experience isn't what saves us. Belief is. Adam and Eve experienced God, but they didn't believe him. And it was their disbelief which destroyed them.

Both the man and the merchant experienced the value of their treasures. But their experience in the field and in the market wasn't enough to satisfy them. They had to possess that treasure. They needed to make it theirs. What that required was them not only seeing something as valuable, but believing it in such a way that their actions proved its value. It became theirs when they believed it to be valuable enough to give up everything for.

Without the giving of everything they would never know the joy of treasuring. They could have been visitors or tourists of this treasure, but as soon as they left it they would have simultaneously left their joy. The value of the kingdom is not in seeing it, but in possessing it through explicit and exclusive faith. If they responded with anything else they would have still been reliant upon what was in their pockets. To feel the weight of joy in the Kingdom of God requires empty pockets in the kingdom of man.

Many of us deny ourselves the joy of treasuring Jesus because we refuse to treat him as our treasure. But it is only through the giving up of other hopes, ideas and comforts that we get to enjoy the beauty of the gospel. To say it another way, we should not be surprised that the joy of treasuring Christ often comes through the fearful experience of giving up everything else.

But if we see it as valuable, and treat it as valuable, we will not be disappointed.

We know this for two reasons: first because here is Jesus telling us this. Jesus spoke this because he wants us to believe this. The God of the universe is promising you that he is your greatest joy. Second, not only has Jesus spoken it, but Jesus has proved it. Look with me at **Revelation 5:9-10**. Jesus died for our sins, Jesus ransomed us back to God, Jesus has established his kingdom, Jesus has brought the reign of God, Jesus is the very promise of God. And his death and resurrection stand as witnesses to his value.

If you do not believe that, you will never experience the joy of treasuring Jesus. But if you believe this, if you empty your heart of all other hopes that we hold onto, and give ourselves fully over to God as our treasure in Jesus Christ, you will say with Paul: **Philippians 3:7-9**.

You see for Paul it was the very act of treasuring Christ which was his treasure. He didn't give up everything and hope that God would give him some emotional ecstasy in return. He believed Christ was more valuable than everything else and that was his treasure. Jesus was his treasure precisely because the gospel enabled him to treasure Jesus.

If you love the idea of treasuring Christ, you must come to grips with the giving up of our other treasures which rule our hearts. There are many gifts which God gives us that we should treasure, but not at the ruling level of our hearts. If we do not treat the gospel as valuable it is not because it lacks value. It's

because we don't believe it. It's because we reject the truth which Jesus has promised and fulfilled on the cross.

So what does this mean for us in closing? I have two brief points, the first is one of caution, the second is one of commission.

First: **Our lives are judged by what they value.** Look at what Jesus says immediately after these two parables in **Matthew 13:47-50**. The irony is we often look at this portion at Matthew and we begin to examine the value of the Kingdom. But we forget that ultimately it is the God of the Kingdom who will examine us.

While we are here, God has provided us time to wrestle with the promise of God in the gospel. But one day time will end. One day you will be judged by the God of the world, and the righteousness of Christ and his kingdom will either be applied to you because you believed him, or you will be thrown into hell where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The very same object which rules your heart will also be the means in which your heart is judged. This is why we must make certain that Christ alone is the object of our faith. It is not Jesus plus a financially secure life. It is not Jesus plus the American dream. It is not Jesus plus a thriving community. It is just Jesus and his righteousness. That is our treasure.

So to those in here who have not yet taken the opportunity to respond to God in faith, I invite you to consider that today. To see that in Jesus Christ your sins have been paid for and through faith and repentance you can be restored to God, the one for whom we were created. The treasure of our souls.

To those who have done this, I want to give one point of application from this text. A point which Jesus makes in **Matthew 13:51-52**.

Do you understand this? Do you believe this? Have you given up your stand-in saviors and false comforts? Jesus says if you know this you are a scribe who is a disciple for the Kingdom of God. That's actually the Greek word here: every teacher of the Bible who has become a disciple of the Kingdom is like a master of a house who brings out of his treasure room what is new and what is old. This is our final point: **The Joyful Obligation of a Captivated Heart.**

Contrary to the scribes of Jesus' day, he is calling for new scribes. Scribes which look at the new covenant in Christ and from it draw wealth old and new.

This means that like children, the greatest thing we have to show others, the truth which we most eagerly want to show others, is the truths of this gospel in all of our lives. In the same way my son cannot think of someone coming into our home and not being invited to see and play with his Legos, if God is our treasure, it ought to be the first thing we bring people to, the primary way we interact with others, and the visible joy which others see in our life.

This is only natural if God is our treasure. It is the joyful obligation of a heart smitten by God. If we see Jesus as our treasure we will gladly pay for it with our lives. Let me give you a beautiful example of what this looks like in closing.

John Bunyan, writer of "Pilgrims Progress" had a very interesting moment which influenced his conversion. One day he was in a small town in England, and he overheard two women talking. To his own admission he said it had become a hobby of his to discuss religion and philosophy. But when he heard these women talking, he said, **"I heard but I understood not; for they were far above, out of my reach; for their talk was about new birth, the work of God on their hearts... they talked how God had visited their souls with love in the Lord Jesus Christ, and with what words and promises they had been refreshed, comforted and supported against the temptations of the devil... They also discussed their own wretchedness of heart, of their unbelief and did consider their own righteousness as filthy and insufficient to do them any good.**

And I considered they spoke as if joy did make them speak, they spoke with such pleasantness of scripture, and with such appearance of grace in all they said, that they were to me as if they found a new world."

Oh to have the same said about the conversations of Sovereign Hope and her members. Oh that the world would look to our coffee dates, our lunch breaks, our dating relationships, career goals and community efforts and say: "They live as if joy did make them live, as if they had found a new world."

And in that moment, as our hearts brim with the joy of God as our chief delight and greatest treasure we may answer them in saying. "Yes, we have found a new world of great joy, but even better than that, that world has found me. It has value, clear and present value, and Jesus paid for it."

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