

Matthew 13:44-46 – Treasures and Pearls

Last night was a traumatic watch for anyone remotely interested in football. In fact, for anyone interested in humanity. For a 29-year-old Danish Inter Milan player collapsed in the Euro 2020 match against Finland.

The look of anguish on his colleagues sent messages around the world that this life was on the balance. No fit 29-year-old should just collapse in a heap on the ground.

I was fortunate to have played football with a Danish team when I turned 18 and I remember how passionate the Danes were for the beautiful game; last night I saw the tortured look on the Danish supporters; the gestures of prayer; the few words from the football pundits, who usually have so much to say, put everything into context. Suddenly and without any warning, a young man's life held in the balance and the football world watched and with bated breath.

But what a relief to everyone an hour-and-a-half later when we heard that he was alive.

Denmark's head coach was in tears at the post-match news conference.

"It was a really tough evening, on which we've all been reminded what the most important things in life are. It's meaningful relationships. It's those people who are close to us. It's family and friends," he said.

"Everything, everything, everything - all thoughts are with Christian and his family."

Sometimes it takes an event like this to put life into context and we suddenly realise what is really important in life.

What is really important in life, is life itself. We are thankful that Christian is making a recovery, but for a short period of time people were thinking the worst and praying for the best.

It's into this context today that Jesus speaks about the most important thing in life. He speaks of treasure and a pearl of great value. He speaks of the Kingdom of Heaven.

This morning we are considering two closely connected parables from the lips of Jesus, all about the Kingdom of Heaven.

He gives us clues, signposts, into how to enter the Kingdom of Heaven and what it means and what it costs. So, what does it teach us?

Jesus said he came to give us life, and life in all its fulness. He has come to give us the most precious gift: LIFE.

He said, *the Kingdom of Heaven is Priceless in value.* There are no words really adequate to describe the worth of the Kingdom, other than to say it is the greatest of all things that we can ever inherit and possess in this life. Jesus compares it with hidden treasure and a pearl of great value.

Priceless, and it cannot be bought for we don't have enough within us to buy it. It is a treasure that is beyond comparison and according to Peter in 1 Peter 1:4, it is incorruptible, undefiled, unfading, eternal, and reserved in heaven for believers.

So, what is Christ's Kingdom?

He said that the Kingdom of Heaven is a treasure lying in the field of this poverty-stricken, bankrupt, world. It is a prize capable of transforming the lives of sinful people. The treasure includes eternal salvation, forgiveness, love, joy, peace, virtue, goodness, glory, eternal life in heaven, the presence of God under his smile and Christ Himself. So, we begin to see why it is the most valuable commodity that can ever be found.

In the words of the old hymn,

But what to those who find? Ah, this

Nor tongue nor pen can show;

The love of Jesus, what it is

None but His loved ones know.

The Kingdom is not superficially visible

So how do we find this treasure? Well, it must be noted that this treasure is not obvious to the human idea. It is hidden, it is under the surface, the treasure was in a field, the pearl was in the sea.

We have to be awoken to the treasure and last night, through Christian Eriksen, there was a wakeup call for many to see what is important in life.

The treasure is there for everyone, but we need eyes of faith to see it. Jesus said *for whoever will seek it will find it.*

Those who have not found the treasure, don't really understand why it's so important. They find it hard to work out why people would want to follow Christ in this secular age. But those who follow Christ know why. Don't we?

The Prodigal son had no desire to return home as long as the world held an attraction but when the world's treasures were spent, he knew deep in his heart that there was still an even greater treasure, but to receive it he would

need to humble himself and return home to his Father. He woke up and saw his life as it really was, miserable and lonely without the love of his Father.

So many are blinded to the treasure because of the lure of the world, materialism, secularism and so it's no wonder today that the church is struggling as people do not value the treasure any longer. We have forgotten the real treasure in life.

But God is still at work in the life of those who seek him. Jesus said, *“Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks the door will be opened.”* Matthew 7:7-8

When I was 19 I went back to church for some reason, the last time had been in Sunday School. One Sunday morning, I felt compelled to go to church and on the way out, the minister said, “John, Follow the Lord!”. Somehow he made it exciting, he made it sound worth searching for.

So it's not superficially visible, and to discover it we must go on a journey.

The Kingdom is personally appropriated

The key figure in both parables is an individual. Each finds something for themselves and makes it their own. This was important for the Jewish people to hear because they thought that being part of Israel made them automatic members of God's Kingdom. Not so! Likewise, today, we often live under the same type of thinking because we are baptised, attend church, are a Church of Scotland member, and that is what gives us entrance into God's Kingdom. All those things are important but each and every person has to discover the treasure for themselves. We cannot rest on what other people have found. If we do, then we will never experience the joy of finding the treasure.

The Kingdom is the true source of real joy

The man who discovered the treasure in the field, with joy, sold everything he had and bought that field. Do you remember the joyful choruses that we used to sing at Summer Missions and holiday clubs...”Joy, joy my heart is full of joy.” “There is a flag flying high in the castle of my heart for the king is in residence there.” Songs of joy and we can sing these with great gusto when we know that the King is indeed living in our hearts. That’s what brings us joy. It is no accident that in the Apostle Paul's Fruits of the Spirit that joy is the second gift that a believer has in their hearts.

Paul wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice.” Phil 4:4. A sure sign of someone who has discovered the treasure is that joy is in their hearts. Last night I'm sure for a few moments Christian's family would have swapped

everything just to have him alive and one can only imagine the raw emotions that they felt. Players surrounded his wife on the park to give her comfort, can you imagine how the family felt later when he could speak to them. Joy is the only word that we have to describe how they felt.

Not everyone comes to the Kingdom by the same approach

The similarities in the parables are great. Two people, each find something of great value. Each understands its worth, and each is willing to give up something precious to obtain the treasure. But there is a difference in the parables. In the first parable the man stumbles over the treasure in a field. In the second parable the merchant seeks the pearl, knowing exactly what he's looking for.

The man in the field was probably going about his daily work. He wasn't searching for treasure, rather he found it unexpectedly. Lots of people enter the Kingdom like this. The Apostle Paul was on his way to persecute Christians when suddenly God entered his life and his life was changed. Likewise, the Samaritan woman didn't expect to find her treasure at the well of Samaria and many others in the Gospels stumbled across Christ and their lives were changed. The Kingdom can come to people in a flash when they suddenly realise the worth of the Kingdom and what they have discovered.

The pearl merchant on the other hand was on a search. He knew what he was seeking for, a pearl of great value. It may have been a lifetime search. He represents someone who is earnestly seeking the Kingdom. He is being drawn to Christ in a conscious quest for eternal life. Like Nicodemus who gradually came to trust in Jesus and eventually discovered the treasure, and most of the disciples discovered the pearl after Jesus' death.

Some people come to faith in Christ by accident, others spend their whole lives searching, like C.S. Lewis whose conversion to Christian faith was a journey. God deals with all people differently. It is all in God's time. Where are you today on the journey? Are you searching, have you discovered it?

Saving faith has a high cost

We find in both parables that the treasure costs a price and is bought. The man in the field, sold everything he had to buy the field, so that he could have the treasure and the man with the pearl of great price sold everything he had to buy the pearl. This is not Jesus saying that we can buy our way into the Kingdom. It is rather demonstrating how much the Kingdom is worth and what it will cost us to gain the Kingdom.

In his parable, he is telling us that it will cost everything we have, in the sense that we give everything to Christ, our lives, our time and our resources.

"Come and follow me" said Jesus, and so the disciple left behind their fishing boats and nets, *"Come and follow me"* said Jesus, and Matthew left behind his world of money and tax. *"Come and follow me"* said Jesus, to the rich young ruler and the rich young ruler went away sad, because he couldn't give away his wealth to follow Christ. Finding the treasure costs, but the cost is surely worth it.

Jesus challenged people to count the cost before committing themselves to follow him and to be part of the Kingdom. He makes this point in several occasions. Once speaking about a king going to war: will the king not sit down and consider the strength of his army against the coming enemy, or the man building a tower will he not sit down and ponder the cost of building it before he starts?

So there is a counting of the cost of following Jesus. But really at the end of day there is no human cost large enough that the joy of discovering the treasure would diminish.

G7 leaders are facing the most important decisions in human history as they seek to tackle climate change. Sir David Attenborough has said, ahead of the G7 summit today, that humans could be "on the verge of destabilising the entire planet". This scientist knows the importance of action now and not tomorrow. Time is not on our side and people all over the planet are waking up to this. His message is urgent. The treasure that we have is life and the very existence of this planet.

Yes, we know, for God so loved this planet earth, that he gave his only Son, Jesus, saw even beyond this beautiful planet earth to eternity, the Kingdom of Heaven itself, and he always challenged people with his brief and succinct words. If he were speaking today, he would be saying to you, *are you seeking the treasure of Life? Are you asking God for it? Are you knocking on the door of life?*

Friends today, receive his gift into you hearts and be like the two people in our parables whose lives were filled with joy because they discovered the treasure of life.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Amen