

“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.”

(Matthew 13:44-46)

Three Stories

George Yost is a name that most of you will not know. He was a memorable fixture in this church for more than 30 years. He was a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ, and he had a passion for foreign missions. He prayed, I think every day, for every missionary household this church supported. He wrote by hand personal notes and letters to every missionary – no Skype, no computer. They loved him, and he loved them.

He kept a big notebook with information on every missionary that he prayed for. One time, George had been at a meeting about missionaries. He brought his notebook with him. It was winter, it was night, and it was snowing. When he left the meeting and got into his car and placed his notebook on top of the car. Maybe he was distracted, or maybe he was cold, and it was snowing hard. He drove off with his notebook on top of the car, and the force of the wind blew it off the car and pages of the notebook were strewn all over the street.

George realized what he had done. He turned the car around and went back where the notebook had fallen. He began to pick up every piece of paper he could possibly find from that treasured notebook. That notebook was his lifeline to missionaries, and danger, dark and snow and cold would not stop him from retrieving everything he could. That notebook was his life.

Jim Elliot was a missionary martyr in the 1950s. When he was a student at Wheaton College, he kept a journal. His wife, Elizabeth, used that journal to write a story of Jim's life called *Under the Shadow of the Almighty*. From the book came his famous quotation: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." In his case what he gave was the ultimate sacrifice of his life.

I have a pastor friend who until he was 40 years old made a very good living as a Wall Street investor in Europe. In his early 40s he stunned his management team by announcing to them that he was going to leave the investment business and become a pastor. They offered him more money. They offered other inducements to stay. They could not understand why somebody would walk away from that kind of wealth in order to become a pastor. All he could tell them was, “The call of God is on my life, and I have to do this.”

And Sold Everything

On and off through my ministry I have heard people say, “I don't want to give my life to Christ; He might call me to be a missionary in Africa.” But it doesn't work that way. Whether it was George in the snow retrieving his missionary papers or Jim Elliot with a Stone Age spear through his heart or my pastor friend walking away from all the perks of a Wall Street investor, I don't think anyone of them would tell you that what they did was a sacrifice. They had a vision of God so compelling they were willing to pay any price in order to pursue that vision and do it with great joy. Their personal well-being didn't really come into it very much. That is what our parables today are trying to tell

us. If you don't see the treasure, you will never sell everything you have and buy the whole field. Vision precedes sacrifice.

A parable is a word picture that helps us to spot God's present in the world. When we see people making sacrifices for Jesus and His Church, we can say with confidence: "That's the kingdom; God is there; God is at work."

Open My Eyes That I May See

Have you experienced God so powerfully that you want everybody else to have the same experience? Have you tried to make someone else have that experience? How is that working for you?

Think about your own experience with God. Why did it take so long for you to have that experience? How did your experience come about? Did someone argue you into that experience or coerce you? Wasn't it because your eyes were open, and you saw God in a way you had never seen before?

The man in the parable saw the treasure in the field. The merchant saw the pearl of great price. Only then did they sell all they had to buy the treasure and the pearl. The real question is: "What opens a person's eyes? And the only answer we can ever give to that question is to say, "God opens a person's eyes."

But something else important plays into this. What about this passage from Jeremiah: **You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord.** (Jeremiah 29:13-14)

Do you want your eyes open to God and his kingdom? If you do, why would you not move heaven and earth to seek God in order to find the Pearl of great price Jesus talked about?

Do you care enough about God to seek Him? If you say, "No, no! I really do care," then why not seek him with all your heart? He will show you the resentments, preoccupations, deceptions, and folly that prevent you from opening your heart to God.

Jesus said: **"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."** (Matthew 6:21) That's the point of these two parables. When Christ becomes the treasure of your heart, your pearl of great price, then, you will be willing to pay any price to have it, and you will count what other people call a sacrifice as less than nothing.

Take Away

Over the past three months I have watched hundreds of you give evidence that you have at least caught a glimpse of the pearl of great price, of the treasure hidden in God's field. You said last Sunday that you were willing to let the suffering of the Church in Iraq stir you to greater devotion to Jesus. You said at the end of August that you were willing to serve Him in this world in some way. You said the last two Sundays of July that you would seek to hear the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and put them into practice. Oh yes, you have seen something of God's treasures. Our Father in heaven has revealed to you something of the eternal. As we hold in our hands the bread and cup and commune with Jesus, let us renew our determination to seek Him with all our hearts.