



## Sermon Transcript August 25, 2019

### There Is Nothing Like It! Parable of Hidden Treasure and The Pearl of Great Price Matthew 13:44-46

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on August 25, 2019 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com)

**Sermon Text**  
**Matthew 13:44-46**

44 “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.

45 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, 46 who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

## Introduction

Have you ever watched the television show *Antiques Roadshow*? On this show people bring items they deem valuable to be appraised by professional appraisers. It is always fun to hear the stories behind the items being appraised and then to discover the actual value and worth of the item. Sometimes the item is far more valuable than what the individual originally thought. Sometimes the item is not worth much at all.

The most valuable thing ever brought to the *Roadshow* was a Honus Wagner baseball card worth \$2.8 million. It never actually made it on the show because the owner already had it appraised and he just wanted the *Roadshow* to give it their stamp of approval. Because part of the intrigue of the show is the process of discovering the value of the item in question, they chose not to televise this man's treasure.

There was another man who actually brought into the *Roadshow* a homegrown potato that he thought looked an awful lot like the face of President Richard Nixon. He figured that if the original Mr. Potato Head still in its box was worth a lot of money, surely this real potato that favored Richard Nixon had to be of some value. While the appraiser agreed that this potato favored the former President, he had to break the news to this poor man that it was basically worthless.

Someone else once brought in an old photo of Edgar Allen Poe. Not only was such a photo rare and unusual, but it was also discovered that this very photo had been stolen from the Players theatrical club in New York City. Consequently, this became the most famous theft-recovery story in *Roadshow* history. This photo from 1847 was worth \$30,000 - \$50,000 and was eventually returned to its rightful home.

Then there was a woman who brought in a stuffed pheasant to be appraised. The bird was in bad condition, in fact it was molting. The appraiser learned that the bird was killed when hit by a car driven by the owner's father-in-law. It was literally road-kill! He was proud that he had run down such a beautiful bird and so he made a trophy out of it. This was obviously another worthless item, but the appraiser was surprised by the reaction of the woman who was told that she possessed a worthless bird. She lunged across the table and kissed the appraiser because now she could tell her husband it was worthless and the bird was going in the basement where it belonged!<sup>1</sup>

This morning we find Jesus playing the role of an appraiser. Much like the appraisers on *Antiques Roadshow*, Jesus is assigning value and worth to the kingdom of God. Through

the parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price, Jesus says that there is nothing of more value in all the world than the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is of more value than a Honas Wagner baseball card. The point of these two parables is that the kingdom of God is of supreme value. There is nothing else that compares in value to the kingdom of God. There is nothing like it!

We only get one shot at this thing called life. We don't get any "do-overs" when it comes to life. There are no "mulligans" in life. You can't rewind the clock and go back and relive life. So the goal is to spend what is left of this precious life on that which is of most value. It would be a sad day if you came to the end of your life and discovered that what you once deemed of most value and what you lived for was worth nothing more than a potato that look like Richard Nixon or a stuffed pheasant killed on the side of a road. It has been said that where you invest your time and your treasure and your talents reveals what you deem to be of most value. Jesus says that kingdom of God is of utmost value in this world and it is worth your time and your treasure and your talent.

### **Two Parables - One Point**

The first of our two parables is found in Matthew 13:44. Here Jesus says, "*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.*" This parable likens the kingdom of God to a "hired hand" who is working in a field and to his surprise discovers a hidden treasure buried in the ground. You can just imagine him tilling the ground and hearing a strange "clunk." "What was that?"

It was not uncommon in ancient Palestine for people to bury things of value in the ground. They didn't have safety deposit boxes to secure valuables or fireproof safes with combination locks to protect their treasures. And furthermore, Palestine was no stranger to war and oppression and so when an army would invade, often people would bury their treasure in the ground for protection. If that person consequently died or was carted off into slavery, that treasure remained in the ground until someone would someday stumble upon it. That treasure could last hidden in the ground for generations.

Now in our culture it appears that the man who stumbles upon this hidden treasure and covers it up and sells all that he has to acquire this treasure is somewhat unscrupulous and deceptive. He knows he is buying something of more value than what the seller is aware. But there was nothing unscrupulous about this in the culture to which Jesus was speaking. It was no different than a man in our culture and time who went to a flea

market in Pennsylvania and for \$4 bought a dismal painting because he liked the frame. As he began to remove the painting, he discovered a copy of the first printing of the Declaration of Independence valued between \$800,000 to \$1 million.<sup>2</sup> We would not think that this man was unscrupulous for not returning the painting with its valuable treasure because the seller was unaware of what he was actually selling. As long as that treasure remained in the ground, within the rule of the culture, the “finder” was free to negotiate a price for the land.

The point of this parable, though, is not in evaluating the rules of the culture when it comes to finding hidden treasure. Rather, the point in this parable is that when you discover the kingdom of God it is of supreme worth and value. The kingdom of God is worth the investment of your time, your treasure and your talents. This man knew the value of the treasure and so he did not hesitate to sell all he had to gain this treasure. So it is with the kingdom of God. Once you discover the treasure and the value of God’s kingdom, you don’t hesitate to give God your life.

It is the same point Jesus is making with the second parable found in verses 45-46. Here he says, *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”* In the ancient world it was often thought that a pearl was of more value and more precious than gold itself. Merchants would scour the seas in search for these precious pearls and if they found one it was worth all they invested to acquire it.

It is like an investor who takes risk by investing in companies hoping the investment pays off. Imagine being an initial investor in Apple. I saw a title to an article that read: “Apple’s original investors are now among the 1%.” Anton Maronivich invested \$1,000 in Apple in 1980. That investment is now worth over \$240,000.<sup>3</sup> Imagine what you would have done if you knew then what you know now.

Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God is like having a hunch when making an investment. You are willing to invest all that you have right now because you are convinced that there is a promise of great reward for your investment. It is like the merchant who sacrifices everything in search for the pearl that is beyond price. Why would he sacrifice everything? Why would he sell it all? He would do so because he knows the ultimate value of the object he is seeking. So it is with the kingdom of God. Jesus says that the kingdom of God is of supreme value. Once you discover the treasure and value of God’s kingdom, you don’t hesitate to give God your life.

What is the treasure of the kingdom of God? What is it about the kingdom of God that causes Jesus to assess its value and its worth the way he does? I would like to share with you three reasons why the kingdom of God is of ultimate value in life. I share these three things with you with the hope and the prayer that after you see these things you will respond like the man who discovered the hidden treasure and the man who sought the pearl of great price. I trust your response is that the kingdom of God is worth the investment of your time, your treasure and your talents.

### **The Ultimate Value of God's Kingdom: It's God!**

First of all, the ultimate value of the kingdom of God is God. We have been created for relationship with God. God is the source and the meaning of life. To miss God is to miss life itself. J. I. Packer put it this way, "Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul."<sup>4</sup> In other words, you can't make sense of life apart from God.

David understood that God was of ultimate value in life. He said that if he had only one request in all of life to ask, this would be it. If the "genie in the lamp" came to you and offered you one request, the request you make would reveal what you value the most. David said, "If left with one request, here is what I would ask for." He says in Psalm 27:4, "*One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.*" His request reveals God's ultimate worth.

In the movie *Sleeper*, Woody Allen plays a character who wakes up in another century, having been frozen in a scientific experiment. He is given some photographs from our century to identify, which prompts a series of hilarious one liners. Billy Graham's picture comes up. Allen pauses, then says, "Billy Graham . . . claimed to have a personal relationship with God." The audience cracks up with laughter. How absurd to think that one can have a personal relationship with God.

Such scoffing at a personal relationship with God is not unusual in our secular age. And yet, there are numerous secular thinkers who can't seem to seem to fully suppress the yearning they have for something transcendent. Tim Keller talks about Harvard professor James Wood who wrote an article for *The New Yorker*. The title of the article was "Is That All There Is?" In the article he writes about a friend who is a philosopher and a convinced atheist. And yet, his friend is finding herself haunted in the middle of

the night—waking up in the middle of the night with this visceral angst over the meaninglessness of her life. She wonders to herself in the middle of the night, “How can it be that this world is the result of an accidental big bang? How could there be no design, no metaphysical purpose? Can it be—that every life—beginning with my own, my husband’s, my child’s and spreading outward—is cosmically irrelevant?”<sup>5</sup>

Wood, who is also a secularist, admits as he gets older that he reads the obituaries a little different than he used to. He said that they are no longer “missives from a faraway place, but local letters, and one’s own projects seem pointless.” In other words, not only does something seem missing in his life. But the thing that is missing is the thing that gives meaning to it all. He describes these moments as “moments of terror and incomprehension.” As he gets older, he says that these terrifying moments are more frequent and they no longer just happen at night, but they also seize him in the middle of the day.<sup>6</sup>

What Wood can’t explain by virtue of reason, he confesses is a matter of intuition. There is in the heart of every man a sense that there is something greater than what we can see with our eyes. There is a sense of the transcendent. Until we find God, the center of life is missing. This is why Jesus says that the kingdom of God is like a hidden treasure or a pearl of great price. This is why the kingdom of God is of utmost value. It is knowing God, who is not just the key to life, but who is life itself. That is how John introduces Jesus to us in John 1. After claiming that Jesus was in the beginning and was with God and was God, he says of Jesus: “*And in him was life, and the life was the light of men.*” Until you find God, you “stumble and blunder through life blindfolded.”

This Fall Season we are going to be walking through a sermon series called “We Believe.” In this series, we will be walking through the doctrinal statement of the EFCA. There are several reasons why we are doing this and I’ll share that with you later. But when the EFCA refreshed their doctrinal statement a few years ago, they flipped statements one and two. It used to be that the first statement was that we believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and so everything that follows in this statement is what the Bible has to say about what we believe. And there is good logic to that order. But the EFCA flipped it and put what we believe about God as the first statement. And it was purposeful. It is how the Bible begins, “*In the beginning, God . . .*” By putting what we believe about God first, we are saying that “the eternal God acts, and he acts by speaking—calling creation into being and, later, revealing his actions and his own character in human words which now come to us in the Bible. It all begins with God.”<sup>7</sup>

So it is with your life and my life. It begins with God. In announcing the kingdom of God to us, Jesus is saying that you can know God. In fact, knowing God is life and therefore is of most value. It is like finding a hidden treasure. It is like finding a pearl of great price. Knowing God is worth everything. Pursue him with your whole heart.

### **The Ultimate Prize of God's Kingdom: It is Life!**

The second reason why the kingdom of God is of ultimate value is because of what it can actually deliver. The kingdom of God can meet the ultimate needs of life and nothing else can meet those needs. You can't buy with money what the kingdom of God brings into a person's life. It is the ultimate prize.

The Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5-7, gives a great picture of what life in God's kingdom looks like. It starts with something called "The Beatitudes." The Beatitudes are nothing more than the blessings that come upon a person who knows God. In fact the word that introduces each of the eight "beatitudes" is the word "blessed." Do you want to know what a "blessed" life looks like? It is not the biggest house and the most toys. Here it is. The "blessed" life is the life that has God in it.

What does that blessed life look like? What are the "blessings" God brings to our lives? When you look at them, you discover that money can't buy these blessings. When you look at these blessings, you discover no amount of will power or self discipline can create these blessings in your life. These are the blessings that come upon a person who lives under the good rule of God in their life. These blessings are more precious than gold and silver. Do you know why? These are blessings we can take with us when we die. These are blessings that outlive this life. Consequently, they are blessings that bring strength and hope for this life as well.

Each of the eight Beatitudes have a promised blessing that comes with it. I am just going to mention the blessings we find listed at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. Here they are: the kingdom of heaven is yours (two times it mentions this blessing. It is found at the beginning and the end of this list.). The other six blessings are as follows: comfort, inherits the earth, satisfied, receives mercy, shall see God and shall be called a son of God.

Let me just take one of these blessings for our purpose this morning. In the kingdom of God we are promised "comfort." This is a "comfort" that comes to the one who mourns over their sin and consequently knows their need for a savior and turns to Jesus and the

cross. For this person, there is real “comfort” of the soul. J. I. Packer suggests that we need to make sure we understand what the word “comfort” means. He said that when we think of comfort we tend to think of a sentimental kind of comfort. He calls it “I-go-to-church-for-comfort-religion.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, “it just makes me feel good.” That is not the comfort Jesus is offering. Rather, the comfort Jesus offers is much stronger than “feeling good.” It is a word that refers to deep assurance.

The Heidelberg Catechism suggests that the comfort that comes to us through Jesus is a comfort that applies to life and death. Steve Jobs, founder of Apple, when contemplating his own death confessed to lacking the comfort that Jesus offers. He said, “it’s strange to think that you accumulate all this experience . . . and it just goes away. So I really want to believe that something survives, that maybe your consciousness endures.” He felt it incomprehensible that something as valuable as human life would simply come to an end. It is as if death were an “off switch” - it is merely a “Click! And you’re gone.”<sup>9</sup> He found no comfort in that. But he didn’t have anything else.

But that is what makes the kingdom of God so valuable. There is a comfort in Jesus that is “*imperishable*.” Because Jesus rose from the dead, so will we. Paul writes, “*For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”*” That is what makes the kingdom of God the ultimate prize! We have true comfort through Jesus in this life and the next. It is imperishable. It will not fade.

### **The Ultimate Joy in God’s Kingdom: It is Influence!**

The final reason the kingdom of God is of most value and worth is because people of the kingdom are people of incredible influence. God uses his people to impact people for the sake of the kingdom of God. God uses us to help others discover the treasure and worth of God’s kingdom. It has the power to rescue lives and impact the course of eternity. There is no greater joy than to be used of God for the good of the kingdom.

Politics is the religion of our post-Christian culture. On the one hand, the left and the right seem to be on ever increasing polar opposites when it comes to their vision of “the perfect world.” But what they share in common is the belief that the answer for our world is their political vision. The danger for Christians lies both on the left and the right. The danger on the left is that you become so progressive that culture determines truth. The danger on the right is that a cultural Christianity emerges that embraces

political policy over people.

But the answer is not in politics. The answer is that we remember that wherever we go, we bring the kingdom of God with us. What does that mean? It means that while we tend to our families, do our jobs during the week and interact with our neighbors—we do so with the idea that we bring the presence and the fragrance of God’s love with us. We do that through serving others. We do that through caring for others. We do that through loving others. People still respond to genuine displays of God’s love. This is what makes the kingdom of God so valuable. It touches other people in the heart and we become the means by which people discover the treasure of God.

### **Two Different Journeys - One Discovery**

There is one last thought I want to share with you from these two parables. It has to do with the process of discovery. Did you notice that the man who discovered the hidden treasure buried in the ground came upon his discovery somewhat by “chance?” By that I mean, he wasn’t necessarily looking for it, but when he discovered it he saw the value of it and was willing to sell all to acquire it. Contrast that with the man in search for the “pearl of great price.” He was looking for it and when he found it he sold all he had to acquire it.

These two contrasting examples provide for us both ends of the spectrum of what we might even find here in our gathering this morning. Perhaps you are here this morning and you were not even looking for Jesus or the kingdom of God and you happened to just stumble “by chance” upon it this morning. And this morning you find your heart being strangely drawn to Jesus. Or, maybe you are here this morning and you are more like the merchant searching for the pearl of great price. You are here because you are seeking for meaning and you have tried everything else and nothing seems to really satisfy the deep longings of your heart.

We would love to help you discover what we have found in Jesus. Hang around and learn who this Jesus is and what he claims to be. This Fall would be a great time to do that as we walk through the essential things we believe. With a simple prayer this morning, ask God to help you discover what it means to know him. Or, perhaps, you are convinced that Jesus is this hidden treasure and pearl of great price and you are ready to give him your life. If so, repent of your sin. Turn in faith to Jesus who died for your sin and rose from the dead. And submit your life to him. He is worthy! Jesus is the hidden treasure. Jesus is the pearl of great price. Jesus is worthy of your life.

There will come a day when all of us will stand before “the Great Appraiser of Life.” Someday we will stand before God. And like on the *Antiques Roadshow* our lives will be appraised. How are you investing your life? Are you investing it in “potatoes” and “stuffed road kill?” Or are you investing your life in that which is of ultimate value? It is God. It is people. It is the kingdom of God. He is the hidden treasure and He is the pearl of great price. God is of ultimate value and he is worth your time and your treasure and your talent. Give God your life!

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<sup>1</sup>Five Unusual Items Brought to Antiques Roadshow for Appraisal” [www.antiques.about.com](http://www.antiques.about.com)

<sup>2</sup>Rita Reif “Declaration of Independence Found in \$4 Picture Frame” April 3, 1991  
<http://www.nytimes.com/1991/04/03/arts/declaration-of-independence-found-in-a-4-picture-frame.html>

<sup>3</sup>Debbie Baratz “Apple’s Original Investors are Now Among the 1%” March 26, 2012 <http://www.valuwalk.com/2012/03/apple-inc-aapl-original-investors-are-now-among-the-1/>

<sup>4</sup>J. I. Packer *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: IVP 1993) 19

<sup>5</sup>James Wood, “Is That All There Is?” Secularism and It’s Discontents,” *New Yorker*, August 14, 2011

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>*Evangelical Convictions* (Minneapolis: Evangelical Free Church of America, 2011) Kindle Reader Location, 703

<sup>8</sup>Packer, 256

<sup>9</sup>Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011) 571

