

## What do you really want? – Matt. 13.44-46

There is a web-site with the name [iwantoneofthose.com](http://iwantoneofthose.com) offering, 'Stuff you don't need .. but really, really want.' USB Cup Warmer in the shape of a cookie, Rubik's Cube Desk Light, Gourmet Gadgets Mini Chocolate Fountain, Salt and Pepper Light Bulbs, Star Wars Millennium Falcon key ring ... 'What do you want?' That is a very basic but most penetrating question. 'What do you want? What do you really want?' I'm giving away my generation when I say that the Spice Girls would reply, 'I'll tell you what I want, what I really really want', and having been told I still wouldn't be much clearer!

The fact is that for all of us there is something. I believe that this is the way we are made. Rarely do we remain contented, or satisfied, or fulfilled for very long. We may think that we have discovered the one thing which will take away the discontent, the dissatisfaction, the lack of fulfilment, but it isn't long before we desire something else, we long for something else. We meet a person and think that they are going to fulfil our deepest desires, and they might, for a while. We get a new job, buy a new home, find a new leisure pursuit, discover a new place, and we think that this is it. 'Now I'm content' we say - but for how long? Contentment, satisfaction, fulfilment, when we get it, does not remain for long.

Let me say again, this is the way we are made, the way we have been 'wired up'. The ancient Greeks spoke of 'nostos', homesickness, a feeling of never being at home, even when you are at home. The Vikings spoke of 'wanderlust', the insatiable need to push further and further into the horizon. Shakespeare talked of 'immortal longings', and the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins called the human spirit 'an imprisoned skylark', Another poet said, 'For every mile the feet go, the heart goes nine.' (e.e. cummings) In Portuguese there is a word, 'saudade', which has to do with the deepest longings of the heart. One of my favourite quotes is from St. Augustine who said, 'Almighty God, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you'. And here I believe we have arrived at the truth.

The reality is that when God made us we were made like Swiss cheese. We have a lot of holes in us that only God can fill. If we do not ask God to fill our emptiness, foolishly we will try to fill it ourselves. We are made for God. Nothing else will do. And God is not to be had fully in this lifetime. Which means that even when we have found rest in God, in this life there will continue to be some measure of dissatisfaction. I say, 'We are made for God', I could also say that we are made for heaven which is where God is. But we are not there yet. We experience in part but not yet fully, and so heaven continues to have that pull upon us continuing to leave us with that measure of discontent, dissatisfaction, and lack of fulfilment, an ache for something more. Someone has said that, 'In this life all symphonies remain unfinished'. The hymn, 'Jesus, the joy of loving hearts' has the verse, 'We taste Thee, O Thou Living Bread, And long to feast upon Thee still: We drink of Thee, the Fountainhead And thirst our souls from Thee to fill.' Tozer, 'To have found God and still to pursue him is the soul's paradox of love, scorned indeed by the too easily-satisfied religionist, but justified in happy experience by the children of the burning heart.' *The Pursuit of God*, p. 15.

I come back to the question, 'What do you want?' 'What do you really want?'

In Matt. 13 Jesus is teaching the crowds in parables and we read that he did not say anything to them without using a parable. The parables answer the question, 'what is the kingdom of heaven like?', and the question behind this is, 'what is God like?' Jesus was showing them what God is like in his own person by how he was and by what he did and in the stories he

told. And when Jesus speaks about the kingdom of heaven, he is speaking about that state of affairs where things are as God orders them, where God's agenda is the norm, where God's will is done, where God rules. And that is often experienced as a topsy-turvy, upside-down, inside-out kingdom where our norms are turned on their head.

Jesus says, 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it....' vv. 44-46.

We learn that people find the kingdom of heaven in different ways. But whether it is by accident as they stumble across it and discover that this is what they really want, or whether it is after a long and patient search, maybe having been aware for some time that there is something which they really want, it is of incalculable value. And so it is worth any sacrifice. It may well cost a person everything. But that person will gain everything.

In the first parable we read of a man, possibly a poor man, who while digging in a field unexpectedly stumbled across some treasure. We don't know what he was doing in the field. Maybe he was a casual labourer, employed by the owner of the field. He wasn't the first century equivalent of the treasure hunters you see on the beach with metal detectors. There is a surprise element in the finding.

And actually sometimes that is how people stumble across the kingdom. They are ploughing the familiar routine of life when all of a sudden they find treasure by surprise. And in fact it's as though the treasure finds them. And for them life is never the same again. For the man in the story, he hid the treasure, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

In case you find this ethically dodgy, in Jewish law, the Rabbis taught, 'If a man finds scattered money, it belongs to the finder.' This man found the treasure, and in his joy sold all he had and bought that field. He gained everything. It cost him everything. What a picture of discovering Jesus!

In the second parable we read of a merchant, a rich man. This man was already looking for fine pearls, 'a pearl fancier who knew perfection when he saw it'. He was involved in a long and patient search until he found one of great value, 'the loveliest thing in all the world'. In those times that was how a really fine pearl was rated. Cleopatra was reputed to have a pearl worth 25m. denarii, a denarius being a day's wage.

For this man there were other pearls in the market, but he found the one that he had been looking for. And actually that is how many people find the kingdom, discover Jesus. They explore other ideas, philosophies, faiths, and they might gain much from them. But then one day they find what they know they have been looking for. They often speak in terms of 'coming home'. For them, life is never the same again. The merchant in the story went away and sold everything he had and bought the pearl of great value. He gained everything. It cost him everything. Again, what a picture of discovering Jesus!

People find the kingdom, discover Jesus, come to know God, in many ways. Some by accident, in a moment. Others after a long and patient search, as part of a process. It would be fascinating to hear your stories - they would all be different. But when it happens, the

immense value is unmistakable. It is treasure, the beautiful pearl. And so it costs everything they have.

It's been said that, 'The entry into the kingdom of heaven is free. The annual membership is everything you've got.' And this expresses something of the paradox. Actually we cannot buy our way into a relationship with God either with money or good deeds. Even when we have entered a relationship with God, we cannot do anything to pay him back. It is grace from beginning to end. And although we use the language of finding God as though the action comes from us, what we find is that it's actually God who has found us. It is grace from beginning to end. God is the one who gives and gives and gives. But the response that God requires of us is that we give of ourselves, and give and give.

We are restless until we find rest in God. We are like Swiss cheese until we stop trying to fill all the holes with other things and let God fill them. We are discontented, dissatisfied, unfulfilled, full of longings, and desire. God has made us this way so that we will seek him, pursue him. But that seeking, that pursuit is costly. When conducting a marriage service I like to use this quote, 'Marriage is a decision to put all the eggs in one basket, to go for broke, to bet all the marbles'. And you could say the same about the kingdom of heaven, finding Jesus, relationship with God, 'It is a decision to put all the eggs in one basket, to go for broke, to bet all the marbles'. It is a decision we make once, but a decision we need to revisit from time to time because although our initial commitment is of prime importance, so is the renewal of our commitment. I speak for myself when I say that it is all too easy to move away from that commitment.

People don't want to hear about wholehearted commitment. And so sometimes when we speak of the good news of finding the kingdom, of discovering Jesus, of coming to know God personally, we leave out the bit about the cost. We don't want to put people off, at least not initially. But it is an essential part.

It will cost us our sins which we will need to repent of, ie. turn from. It will cost us our self-centredness, ie. we will be centred upon God. It will cost us our independence, we will be dependent upon him. It will cost us our secrecy because this will not be something which we will keep only to ourselves. It will cost us the quiet life, because true followers of Jesus may come up against it. It might cost us our career, our money, our possessions, our family. I am not making this stuff up. I am drawing on the words of Jesus himself. In fact according to him, it will cost us our life. In Matt. 16.24, Jesus says, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.' The question is, is it worth it? And I want to say, 'Yes!'

Through Jesus' life lived among us, through his death on the cross for us, and his resurrection to eternal life, in other words, through the enormous cost to God himself, we are forgiven our sins, we are put right with God, we are adopted into his family, we are given his Spirit, we are given new life, new hope, new peace, new joy. We become what we were designed to be, who we truly are meant to be.

What do you want? What do you really want?

You may be familiar with cost benefit analysis. This is a tool which determines how well, or how poorly, a planned action will turn out. Put simply you put your pros in one column, the benefit, and the cons, the cost in the other, and you weigh them against each other. If you

do that in relation to the kingdom of heaven, to knowing God through Jesus, it is my conviction that although there is a cost, the benefit outweighs it by far.

Jim Elliott, a missionary in Ecuador who was martyred by the Indians, said this, 'He is no fool who sacrifices what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.' The apostle Paul put it this way, 'Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.'