

Parables of hidden treasure and pearl – Matthew 13:44-46 – 15th July 2018

In 2014, a man called Paul Coleman went treasure hunting – he’s a member of the Weekend Wanderers Detecting Club. They were detecting in a Buckinghamshire village, not far from here, called Lenborough. Mr Coleman found a sheet buried in the ground – unwrapping it, he discovered more than 5,000 Anglo-Saxon coins, valued at £1.35m. If any of you watch the brilliant BBC sitcom *Detectorists*, you’ll know that this is the kind of find Lance and Andy spend every waking moment dreaming of. The ultimate story of treasure hidden in a field.

Or is it? Is there a greater treasure we’ve missed? It brings us nicely to our story today, doesn’t it? We’re currently using our summer months to look at 9 of Jesus’ most famous parables. Each parable is a story with a meaning – a sting in the tail, a thought to ponder on. Last week we thought about the sower, and the 4 types of soil, and we asked ourselves the question – what kind of soil is your heart? It’s a fantastic story, one that makes us think – but for many of us, it needs explanation. Most of us are not farmers, we have to put ourselves in unfamiliar shoes to get the real meaning.

But today it’s much simpler. Judging by the number of shows about antiques and the like – *Cash in the Attic* and so on – many of us dream of finding treasure hidden away somewhere. (Has anyone done that?) I think many of us are like Paul Coleman, looking for that undiscovered hoard.

So Jesus’ story for us today hits a nerve – the treasure-find. Only in Jesus’ tale, the outcome was different – instead of *receiving* a massive windfall, the unnamed member of Nazareth Metal Detecting Club (NDMC) in the story *spent* his life savings to buy the field.

What does it mean? What is Jesus trying to get us to think about? That’s our challenge for today – but we’ll start with the subject of our story, which Jesus tells us is ‘the kingdom of heaven’. What’s that? It’s not the bad film about the crusades from a few years ago! The kingdom of heaven is a phrase Jesus uses many times, and by it he means the in-breaking presence and activity of God in the world. Jesus has come as the messenger of a new era, one where God’s love is available to all. *He* is the king of this kingdom, and it is completely different kind of kingdom. A kingdom of love to rival the political and military kingdoms of the world. There’s no power except the power of God’s love, no coercion except the desire of our heart to do what is right, a kingdom where freedom is freedom to give and to serve not to indulge our base instincts.

It is a revolution, a completely different vision of society. And in these stories Jesus is painting pictures trying to help us understand what that kind of king, that kind of kingdom might be like. It’s not a political manifesto with policy statements and technical detail. These are paintings, poems & parables, powerful images which evoke strong emotions. Jesus’ kingdom: what’s it really like? How do we experience it? In this story we learn a few simple but profound things, don’t we?

It’s precious. That’s the key point here, isn’t it? The kingdom of heaven is worth everything – it’s treasure. It’s the gift inside the wrapping paper. And to be honest the wrapping paper isn’t always that attractive. The church is not always the best advert for the Jesus’ kingdom is it? We might as well be honest about that. But let’s not judge the gift by the wrapping paper.

I remember when we got married we had an eccentric friend called Mike – he was a lovely man, a scientist with a brain the size of Birmingham. He visited a few weeks our wedding and gave us 2 presents, neither of which looked very appealing. The first was a scrap of paper he got out of his pocket. ‘Hello’ we thought, ‘what’s that?’ It was a poem he wrote for us which was just the most astonishing piece of writing we’d read, and completely unique. No present we’d received was remotely like it. Our own poem, written especially for us.

The second was wrapped in newspaper. Again we tried to look happy and wondered what on earth it was but inside was a crystal lamp – like a larva lamp but 10 times better – thousands of shards lit by a bulb which glinted and gleamed. It was stunning, and had pride of place in our lounge for years. They were the best presents we got for our wedding – but the wrapping was terrible. Like treasure in a muddy field. The kingdom of heaven is precious – the most precious thing you’ll find in this life. We’ve welcomed Chloe and Poppy into that kingdom today. It hasn’t cost a penny, but it’s still the most precious thing this world affords. [Reminds me of: when the Archbishop of Canterbury crowns a new monarch he places a bible in their hands and tells them to receive this book, the most precious thing which this world affords.’ I could have said that to the Brimley family today.](#) The kingdom is precious.

But there’s a surprise here in what Jesus tells us. We might expect him to describe it as precious, but what we might not expect is that **it’s hidden**. The treasure is hidden in a field – it’s not easy to find. It’s also a fine pearl, it takes effort to look for it. Why doesn’t Jesus make it easier for us? That’s a question I’ve heard countless times. People who’ve prayed and not felt their prayers had been answered as they’d like. People who’ve suffered or seen a friend or family member suffer. Natural disasters. Conflicts and victims of conflict. [If God is all powerful, if he’s the king: why isn’t it more obvious?](#)

There are no easy answers to that question, but all I can say is that [this is the vulnerability of true love. Love which is forced is not love.](#) In our society a forced marriage is a crime. We can’t force people to love us. Love requires free will, free choices – and that comes at great cost. If God intervened to stop every bad thing in this world, he would have to rule it like a tyrant – he’d have to intervene so many times there would be no freedom, and if there’s no freedom, there’s no love.

The extraordinary thing about Jesus’ kingdom is that he voluntarily sacrifices his almighty power to achieve it, so that his rule might be based on love and not force. He is the creator of the universe, He can do whatever He likes, but He knows that without freedom there is no love, without love there is no relationship, without relationship we might as well not exist at all. It means that treasure seems hidden – but it is there for all who search for it.

Too many people conclude in life that the treasure of God’s simply isn’t there. It is, it always has been – but Jesus tells us in this story that we must choose to seek it. The kingdom is hidden treasure.

Finally **the kingdom is costly**. The two treasure seekers in our parables both sell everything they have to get the treasure. This is the most uncomfortable part of the story, and it’s the challenging part of the baptism promises. We trust in Christ as Lord – Lord means boss, in other words Jesus

gets to decide how we live our lives. To live in Jesus' kingdom means that we'll swim against the tide – and that has good bits and difficult bits. We love the bits about being kind and helping others, but there's the other bits about loving enemies, about radical generosity, about putting Jesus first even if it means ridicule or rejection.

People often caricature Christian faith as a crutch for weak people – but actually the opposite is true. It's for quiet heroes, it's for people willing to live an adventure. Anyone who's actually tried it knows that the old cliché about it being a crutch is nonsense, usually said by people who are too proud or too cowardly to try it themselves, who find their own crutches in drink or gambling or popularity or whatever. (And if anyone here today thinks that following Jesus is a crutch – just try it for a few months and see how you shape up!)

Today Chloe and Poppy have become heroes! But why would they choose that path? Because, as Jesus says, **it costs everything because it's worth everything**. Who wouldn't give something up to win the ultimate prize?

Jim Elliott, a missionary in Ecuador who was martyred by the Indian people he went to share the kingdom with, was once asked why he was going to risk his life to do it and he said this, 'He is no fool who sacrifices what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.' This message of knowing and following Jesus is worth everything, and it brings us great joy.

Paul Coleman found great joy in his treasure. But there is a greater treasure – it might take some finding, but it's worth everything we've got. It's the treasure we've just given Chloe and Poppy today and there's nothing like it. READ v44.

Whose field are you buying today?