

Matthew 13:44-51

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[0 : 0 0] Well, are you into art? I wonder if some of you are. I have to confess I'm not particularly into art, especially abstract art. We had a friend staying with us a couple of weeks ago who told me how he and his wife have a poster of a Jackson Pollock painting in their living room somewhere and they'd like to talk about it and discuss it. Now, I looked up a Jackson Pollock painting this morning on the internet and to me Jackson Pollock number five was a brown mess with lots of yellow and white lines through it. It means nothing to me. There's a sort of beauty to it. So if you love it, good on you, that's great. It doesn't mean much to me. It's not to my taste. It's obviously someone's taste because back in 2006 someone spent £140 million, or a million dollars rather, buying it. So it's obviously someone's taste.

They found value even where I didn't see any. Now, I don't know if you're into art, but a lot of people treat Christianity like art. You can be into it or not. You might find it interesting, you might not. It might be to your taste, it might not. I have a neighbour, I think I mentioned him a couple of weeks ago, he said, you know, why should I bother with religion, Stuart? I gave up on religion when I was 18 and I didn't have to go to church anymore, so I started doing sport more. Instead, I was more interested in sport. So that's how people often think, isn't it? We can be into art, into sport, into Christianity, into whatever you like. It doesn't harm anyone. And perhaps in the crowds that Jesus had been speaking to, perhaps amongst even the disciples he was now speaking to by this stage, there were people who had the same kind of, well, I can take it or leave it attitude. The crowds were starting to drift away from Jesus. There'd started to be opposition. Back in chapter 12, we saw that. The religious leaders rejecting Jesus, being hostile to him. And so perhaps some were thinking, oh, this isn't that important. It was interesting seeing the miracles, but I don't want to know any more. I'm not really into this. It's not my cup of tea, or whatever the equivalent first century Palestinian expression would have been. Well, look at what Jesus is saying here. He rounds up his teaching to his disciples, and it is just the disciples he's speaking to here. If you look back to verse 36, you'll see Jesus leaves the crowds by the lakes, moves into a house. He's now talking to his disciples. And he wants them to understand that his kingdom, his message, the good news of Jesus, is not just something to take or leave depending on whether you're interested. He wants them and us to see that it's priceless and of fundamental importance. You see what he's talking about if you look at verse 44.

He says, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. Now, you have to pause there, don't we, and say, what is the kingdom of heaven? We know what the United Kingdom is. That's an island of various other islands that we're standing on at the moment. But what's the kingdom of heaven? Well, it's not heaven itself. But the kingdom of heaven is not a place, physically, right now. Rather, the kingdom of heaven is everywhere and everyone who accepts the king of heaven as their king. In other words, the kingdom of heaven is wherever Jesus rules, whoever Jesus rules over. That's what the kingdom of heaven is about. And so far in Matthew chapter 13, Jesus has told a number of stories to explain what the kingdom of heaven is like. He's described it as being something that's currently small but will grow huge, like a mustard seed that grows into a great tree. It's like yeast, it's hidden at the moment, and yet has a big transformative effect. It is opposed, like the weeds in the field, like the wheat in the field which has got weeds planted through it by an enemy. It is currently opposed but will one day triumph.

And he said the message of it is something that will bear fruit in some people's lives but is ignored by others. Now he gets to these last few parables. And the first two parables here have very similar messages. Look at verses 45 to 46. So the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered it up. 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 who on finding one

pearl of great value went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Now we see the big message there if we look at the similarity between those two stories, those two parables. The similarity is this, isn't it? These two people both find something that is incredibly valuable. And so they're prepared to get rid of everything else they have so they can possess this thing that is so valuable. See it's not so much a story about the cost of being part of the kingdom, although that is true and that is there. Rather it's just sort of the value of the kingdom. Judges, neither of these men in these stories resented giving up what they had to possess this treasure or this pearl. Look at verse 44. When the man finds the treasure, he covers it up and in his joy he goes and sells all that he has. It's what he wanted. It was the thing of most value. Similarly this merchant who finds the pearl he's been looking for all his life and he'll sell all the others to be able to have this one thing. He does it happily. I guess a bit like the guy who bought Jackson Pollock number five. He parted with that \$140 million joyfully, apparently, to have this painting that he's so wanted. And actually all human beings are all like that, aren't we? We all do what we think will make us happy. We all do what we think will make us happy. That was Blaise Pascal's observation back in the 17th century, the great

[6:02] French polymath, that every man does work for his own happiness. For some it leads them going to war, for others it leads them to commit suicide. But with each one it's the same motive, it is to be happy. And so it is with these people in Jesus' story. They're prepared to sell all they have to get the thing that is most treasured, that will make them most happy to be part of the kingdom. As I think about the people I've met in my life, I know people who have given up a huge amount because they found the treasure of knowing Jesus as their Lord the Savior, the treasure of being part of his kingdom. I think of a friend of mine who had worked hard all his life to become a professor of psychology at a decent university in the States where he was from. And he just got to the point where having laboured to get his PhD, having laboured in postdoctoral studies, having laboured in teaching, he finally got to the point where he had a secure job. But in those years of teaching, he'd become a Christian.

And so he left the secure job behind, pretty much sold everything they had, to move to start studying at a seminary, to become a minister, and is now trying to start a little church in Boston in the US. Given up everything. Why? Because of the treasure of knowing Jesus as being part of his kingdom. Think of a friend of my old church who had become a Christian while outside her native country of Iran. And she could not go back. She had to leave behind family and friends and seek asylum in this country. Why? Well, ultimately because of the value of being part of Jesus' kingdom. And that's the point Jesus is making here. To be part of his kingdom, to know him, to have all that he offers, is far greater, more greater riches than anyone could ever find on earth. But why? Why is the kingdom of heaven so valuable? Why is it not just take it or leave it, like whether you like art or sport? Well, if we read through all that

Jesus teaches, we find that in the kingdom of heaven, we can find acceptance. It doesn't matter what you've done, where you've been, however many mistakes we've made in life, however many people we've hurt. There is a warm welcome and forgiveness from heaven's king, Jesus.

Not only that, but we can be made into new people in the kingdom of heaven. As people trust Jesus as their king, he changes our hearts, changes our lives, makes us new. We're no longer defined by our genes, by our family upbringing, by our education, or anything else we feel defines and restricts us. Jesus makes us new in his kingdom. And in the kingdom of heaven, we also find real hope. We find that Jesus is a king who came to take upon himself the suffering of the world, the evil that is in the world, the punishment that it takes to put the world right. He took it all on himself, so that he can offer hope, hope of a world to come, where every tear will be wiped away. Do you see the treasure? The treasure of acceptance? The treasure of a fresh start? The treasure of a real hope? That is the treasure of his kingdom.

Some don't see the treasure in the field, some don't see the true value of that pearl. But Jesus says it is there. It might cost us to have that treasure, it might cost us to follow Jesus. For some of us it might cost our reputation. People think, well, how could he or she believe that nonsense? For every one of us it costs us our pride. As we admit we have no riches of our own, but need what Jesus offers. For some it costs our friendships. For some it costs the lie-in on a Sunday morning. But it's real treasure, says Jesus. That's a great similarity between these stories, but you notice also the difference. The first person isn't looking for treasure, he just stumbles across it in the field. Wasn't searching, but he found it. I think of a friend of mine who's a bit like that. She wasn't seeking

spiritual answers, she wasn't looking for meaning in life, she just went out for drinks with a couple of colleagues on Friday night after work. And one of these colleagues was a Christian, and this other, this

[10:32] Christian colleague was talking to the other friend, trying to persuade him something about Christianity. As my friend listened in, she suddenly thought, this is true. So very quickly she turned to Jesus as her Lord and Saviour. She wasn't looking, but she was found. She found a treasure. On the other hand, other people are like this merchant in verses 45 and 46, who search hard all their lives, try to find something of value. Try to find something to make life worth living. Try to find something that makes sense of life. Now, I wonder who you can identify with. If you're the person who is searching for something of great value, then can I encourage you to keep searching? I'm glad you're here. Maybe you've got questions. I'd love to talk to you about it.

Let's chat briefly at the end and put some time in the diary to go for a coffee or something. Keep searching. Keep looking. That's the first difference between these people. One wasn't seeking but found. One was searching hard and long. But the other difference is the social difference between them. The socio-economic difference, if you like. The man who stumbles across the treasure in the field is just a labourer. Just a workman. Just happens to be in the field and finds this thing. So he sells everything he can to buy the field and get the treasure.

The other man? Well, he's wealthy, isn't he? He's a merchant trading fine pearls. He's a wealthy man. See the point Jesus is making here by these two contrasts? This kingdom is for everyone. From the richest to the poorest. Doesn't matter our background. Doesn't matter which country we're from. Doesn't matter how educated we are. It is for everyone. And it is so valuable. It's his first story. Jesus teaches us the kingdom is so valuable. It makes everything else disposable. Disposable by comparison. So valuable. Well, I guess the disciples at that point may have thought, well, okay, you say it's valuable, Jesus, but right right now with people picking on us, right now with the scribes and the Pharisees against us, we're not so sure. So Jesus tells them another story. Look at verse 47. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers that threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace in the place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It's great Jesus gives us the explanation, isn't it? We can't miss the point of this parable. He's telling us that one day there's going to be judgment, there's going to be separation, the righteous and the evil. Jesus is making the point that the kingdom is not only valuable, it is inescapable. It is inescapable. Everyone is in this story. All of us, all of us are fishing who will be caught in this net one day. And the question is, are we going to be on the righteous or the evil? We'll come to that in a moment. But I guess there's a, amongst us, there could be a natural instinctive reaction against teaching about judgment, can't there? It all sounds so, so mean, doesn't it, in some ways. You say, well, hang on, how can a God of love judge people? That's something I hear quite a lot. Maybe it's thought you've got right now. Well, let's think about that for a moment. How do you feel if someone you loved, if someone you loved was killed by a drunk driver, or was blown up in a terrorist attack, how would you feel? Well, if we loved the person who was the victim, we'd want justice for them, wouldn't we? We'd want justice to be done. We wouldn't say, oh, it doesn't matter. I'm a tolerant, loving person. I don't care that my loved one died. That wouldn't make sense, would it? See, justice is not the opposite of love. The opposite of love is indifference and apathy. So loving God must care, must judge. He must judge people when they hurt you, because he loves you. And so when they hurt you, he must judge them. But of course, the catch is that when I hurt people, when I offend against people, because the Lord God loves those people, he requires justice of me. See, God has to judge because he is a God of love. But there's another way in which people are tempted to, we're often tempted, I think, to soften Jesus' teaching about judgment. I said, okay, well, yes, I believe in heaven, I believe in eternal life, that's good, but surely a loving God wouldn't punish people for all eternity, would he? Now that would just be vindictive, that wouldn't be just. And actually, if all we knew about hell was what Jesus says here, in verse 49 and 50, the evil we've thrown into the fiery furnace, in that place, there'd be weeping and gnashing of teeth, if that was all Jesus had ever said, then we might think, well, maybe, maybe hell doesn't last that long. But in other places, Jesus is really clear. So in Matthew 25, verses 46 and 47, he talks about the contrast between eternal punishment and eternal life. Jesus is clear. Rebellion against an infinite God justly demands infinite punishment. There is no get out of jail free card. And that's why

Jesus tells us this parable. Because he loves us and wants to give us a warning. The kingdom of heaven is inescapable. It's inescapable. And therefore everything else is trivial in comparison. The kingdom of heaven is valuable, so everything else is disposable by comparison.

But the kingdom of heaven is inescapable. So every other issue, every other question is inescapable by comparison. Imagine if you were woken up in the middle of the night by the sound of a fire alarm going off, and you suddenly realise that your bedroom was swamped by flames on the door of your bedroom. Your house is about to be burned down. What would you do? Would you go to your wardrobe and calmly get dressed in your nicest clothes, so when the fire became, you'd look good? I suspect not. Suddenly your appearance becomes trivial, doesn't it? Absolutely trivial. You've got to save your life and get out of there. And that's why Jesus tells this story. He loves us. He wants us to see that his kingdom is inescapable.

[17:31] There is judgment coming one day for all of us. But Jesus has something else he wants to say to us and to his disciples. Remember, he's speaking to his disciples here. He's training his disciples up to do his work, to tell people his message, to pass that on. And so as any good teacher, at the end of his teaching, he asks them, verse 51, have you understood all these things? And like every scared student, they say, yes. And frankly, they probably didn't understand everything as we discover as they go on in the Gospel. But Jesus had explained some of these parables to them. They understood some things. So he goes on and says this to them in verse 52. He said to them, therefore, every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. Now the scribes were the religious teachers of the day. They were the experts in the Old Testament law. And so that was how they made their living.

They were teacher people. They'd be the go-to folks. If you ever have a question, the scribes would be able to answer it. But often the scribes were in conflict with Jesus. So read through the Gospels, we find that. So that's why Jesus adds this little caveat. It's every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven. Actually, that would be better translated, every scribe who is a disciple of the kingdom of heaven. Every scribe who has had their hearts transformed by trusting in my message, says Jesus. What's every scribe who is a disciple of Jesus like? He says this, doesn't he? Verse 52. It's like a master of a house who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. It's almost, if you can picture it for a moment, it's like going to one of these great stately homes owned by the National Trust.

You get there and you see the old Rembrandts and the beautiful Ming vases. And then the tour guide takes you around the back and shows you the brand new Aston Martin. Or the very posh, bang and loathsome sound system that's been bespoke designed to go in one of the rooms there. It's treasures old and new. Well, as Jesus puts it, treasures new and old.

Why would the tour guide be showing you those things? Not just to show off how great the riches are in the house, but because they're beautiful, desirable things. Look at this vase. Look at this incredible sound system. Look at the beauty that's on display here. And that's the message Jesus wants his disciples to hear. That the teaching of God's kingdom is so beautiful, it should be shared. That's why he says the master of the house brings out his treasure, what is new and what is old, to display it so others can see the beauty of this message. Now what is the storehouse that the master brings the treasures out of? Well, we have a little clue to sort of back over the page. Back in chapter 12, verse 36. Jesus talks in verse 35 about the person out of his good treasure brings forth good. The evil person out of the evil treasure brings forth evil. What is the treasure? Well, back in verse 34 he tells us, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. So the treasure house is the heart. Jesus is saying if you can bring out these teachings, the new teachings, the teachings about my kingdom, the teachings about me as the king, and the old treasures, the treasures of the Old Testament, which is always promising that a kingdom would come one day, that a king would come one day, and bear away the sins of his people, pay the punishment for them, so that the kingdom could be established, so that the perfect world could be renewed again. They are the treasures old and new. They are stored in the hearts of every disciple, everyone who truly trusts in Jesus and knows him as their king. So Jesus says to his disciples, this beautiful treasure needs to be shown, needs to be talked about, needs to be displayed. The treasure of knowing that the king has died, so that rebels like me and you can be part of his kingdom, and not just enemies who will be destroyed. The treasure of the good news, that we can be accepted no matter what we've done, because of what Jesus has done. The treasure of the good news that's told throughout the story, of God's

promise to make our hearts new, that we might want to obey him and want to walk in his ways. The treasure that is hidden in the Old Testament and revealed in Jesus, of the kingdom to come, where there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain. It's beautiful treasure, isn't it? If we believe it, what could possibly stop us sharing it with others?

It's what Jesus wants his disciples to see. It's such beautiful news, it should be shared. Well, back in November 2006, there was a letter in the Financial Times from Professor Jessica Kessler from the University of California in Los Angeles, and he wrote this letter telling of how, as a young man living in New York, he'd become, he'd seen a beautiful picture, what he thought was a beautiful picture, in Betty Pearson's small gallery. He wrote, I longed and lusted for it. I was almost 19, and she begged me for two weeks to take it off her hands for \$450. She was willing to accommodate me if I would pay her just \$5 a week. But that was the weekly allowance for my bus fare to the college classes. So he never made the sacrifices to get the picture he loved. He concluded the letter by saying, well, the picture was, of course, Jackson Pollock number five, sold November 2006 for \$140 million. He concluded his letter saying this, let your readers try to imagine how many miles of blocks I have kicked myself around since 1948. Why? Because it was a treasure. It was valuable. The message of the Kingdom of Heaven is even greater. It is so valuable, it makes everything else seem disposable. It is inescapable, it makes everything else seem trivial. It is so beautiful. It must be shared by those of us who know it. We don't want to kick ourselves around blocks. Because actually when judgement comes, we won't be able to kick ourselves around blocks. Let's pray.

[24:10]