

Matthew 13:47-58

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[0 : 00] Do turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 13. Matthew chapter 13. And we're finishing off a series on the parables in Matthew 13.

! I head off on holiday on Thursday,! Now someone was telling me that when they became a Christian, their girlfriend lost all respect for him.

She was utterly baffled that he had given his life to Jesus. It was like she thought he'd gone soft in the head, and so a relationship that mattered very, very much to him slowly went wrong and was over.

And maybe today you look at your colleagues in work, and for them in work, their career is everything that matters to them. Work matters to you, but not in the way it matters to them. You want to bring honour to Jesus, but you're not driven in the same way to get to the top, at all costs. And so you sometimes look at their holiday, you look at their successes, and look at the holidays they go on with a kind of wistfulness, a bit of envy.

[1 : 30] You think, it could have been me, if I hadn't been following Jesus. Maybe it's friends at school, or people in your family, and following Jesus has made you feel rather different from them.

Maybe there's this drip, drip, drip of mockery, and it hurts. And moments like that, we begin to wonder if following Jesus really is the right thing to do.

Maybe we've not consciously articulated it, but over time, living in the midst of that, we've just eased off the Christian life a little bit.

Once we were like the guy in verse 44, can you see him? In verse 44, this guy discovers Jesus, in his joy, he goes and says, all that he has, whatever it cost to buy that field, whatever it cost was nothing besides the value of that treasure.

It was joy. But now maybe the thrill has gone. Or maybe you're like the merchant in verse 45, of all the pearls in all the world, that pearl was the one worth having.

[2 : 48] It was the one worth having more than any other pearl. But now a few years, maybe a few decades down the track, well, there are other pearls. And we don't want to miss out on them.

It's a curious thing, isn't it? If you have an athlete or a sports person who is totally devoted to winning a gold medal, or totally devoted to winning that trophy, we admire them.

They're all out for it. They're all in for it. And we admire them. But if we talk about being totally devoted to the Lord Jesus, it sounds just a bit unhinged, doesn't it?

And I guess that's because we've muddled the price tags up. A gold medal seems worth it. A trophy seems worth it. Success in work seems worth it.

But Jesus, well, we're not so sure. And by the time you get to the end of chapter 13, I think it is a bit of a puzzle. Jesus, you say that following you is like treasure.

[3 : 54] Jesus, you say you are the one, that you're the pearl worth having, but it doesn't look like it. And if we're going to understand the puzzlement of the disciples at the end of chapter 13, you've got to go back right to the beginning of the Bible.

The story of the Bible, you know it, is the story of a God who is the creator of the world. And because he's the creator of the world, he's the ruler of it.

He made us, and so he's the one that knows how we're to live. He has the authority to say who is right and who is wrong and what is right and what is wrong.

But the story of humankind is a story of rebellion. It's a story of us saying, we will not have you as our king. We will not recognize you as our king.

We want to go our own way. We don't want to go your way. We want to do our own thing. And so his kingdom has been taken over by rebel forces. And whenever rebel forces take over a kingdom, there's bloodshed.

[4 : 58] There's always chaos and fear on the streets. And that is what the world has become. But back in the Old Testament, in the midst of that confusion, God had promised that he would send his king into the world.

He would send his king into the world to rebuild it, to rebuild his kingdom. And he gives to us a beautiful vision of a king who will put down the rebellion, who will deal with all things that are wrong and put all things right.

And he will wipe away every tear dry. And all that is broken will be fixed. Everything will be restored to how the king wants it to be.

And people will be restored to a right relationship with the king they were created for. It will be paradise. That's the end of the story of the Bible. The Old Testament ends with 400 years of waiting, 400 years of nothing.

No sound. And then there's a guy called John the Baptist who gets up and he says, get ready because the king is coming. People are looking round for the Lord of the universe to step onto the stage and up steps Jesus of Nazareth.

[6 : 10] And he says, here I am. I'm the one you've been waiting for. I'm the one who will bring in the kingdom of heaven. And that phrase comes up again and again and again, doesn't it, in Matthew chapter 13.

This is what it means. This is what the kingdom of heaven is like. It is God the king keeping his promise to restore all things to how they were meant to be.

It is God the king keeping his promise to restore all things to how they were meant to be. And Jesus is saying, I am that king. At first, the disciples, they are so excited to be part of this.

They drop everything literally and follow Jesus. It started off brilliantly. Jesus teaches and thousands sit spellbound.

He heals the sick. He stills the storm. He even raises a little girl back from the dead. And the disciples are thinking, this is God's king.

[7 : 12] He's got the power and he's got the authority to put this broken world back together again. To quash rebellion. And then things take a strange turn. Jesus starts warning his followers that he will get arrested.

John the Baptist, he gets thrown into prison. Jesus performs miracles in Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum and people do not acknowledge him as king.

And the religious authorities, they start to plot to kill him. And Jesus says to his disciples, follow me, come and be part of what I'm doing to restore all things to how they were meant to be.

This is treasure. This is the one cause worth living for and dying for and giving up everything for. But the question is, are you sure, Jesus?

Because if you really are the king and if you really do have authority and power to deal with what's wrong and you really can put things right, how come things are going so wrong? How come life is as it is?

[8 : 28] Look at verse 47. Jesus says, again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind.

When the net was full, men drew it ashore, sat down and sorted the good into containers, but threw the bad away. Two points this morning. The first thing is this.

Jesus wants you to remember that the kingdom of God is treasure when you remember the day that's to come. Jesus wants you to remember that the kingdom of God is treasure when you remember the day that is still to come.

The picture Jesus paints is that there are all kinds of fish swimming in the lake. There are sardines, there are catfish, fish, there's cod, there's sea bass, there's tuna, whatever there is else on sailing little.

And there's a great net. There are two boats, actually, and the net is put between the two boats and they trawl through the lake. And they sweep up the fish.

[9 : 39] It's dragged along. And then the net is dragged onto shore and they sort the fish. There is the good fish. There's the fish they can sell. And they keep them and they put them in a basket.

And they're the fish that are ready for market. But there's also the bad fish. Bad fish that they can't sell because no one will eat them. And the bad fish get thrown out and the good fish get eaten.

Neither option is particularly appealing, is it? Which is just a great reminder, isn't it? You need to remember when you come to the parables that we're not meant to push the parables into different

directions.

The simple point is this. Jesus is saying there's going to be a day of sorting out. Today there are two kinds of fish. There are the good fish and the bad fish and they're swimming around in the lake together.

But today is not the end of the story. There's a net coming and one day all the fish will be sorted.

And Jesus is saying, isn't he, there are two types of people.

[10 : 42] There are the wicked and the righteous and the wicked are those who continue to rebel against the king and the righteous are not those who are better than everyone else but they are those who put down their weapons.

They've turned from their rebellion and they've got right with the king and they've been restored to a right relationship with the king and they are following Jesus. And the thing is, if you are following Jesus, you are swimming around in the lake of this world.

And you are looking around and you are thinking, I thought, I thought the king was meant to love his people. I thought the king was meant to love and protect them.

But we all seem to be swimming around in the same lake. And when there's a war, the righteous get caught up in the same war as the wicked. And when there are redundancies, the righteous get laid off the same as the wicked.

And both groups suffer injustice. Both groups get sick. Both groups get sad. And there are still tears. And often it's the very fact that we are following Jesus that has caused the tears.

[11 : 59] Look through the lens of today and it makes you wonder, does this king actually have the authority that he says he has? I mean, we've thrown our lot in with the right guy, have we?

But today is not the end of the story. There's a net coming. And there's going to be a day when the king sorts everyone and everything out.

Just like the fishermen lower their net into the lake, Jesus says he will send his angels to gather up all the people in the world. They'll gather up presidents and prime ministers and all the people of every tribe and nation and language and all your friends and all your family and everyone in your whole school and all your colleagues and the people you love and the people you envy because they seem to have it all.

and he will gather them all up and sort them. Look what it says in verse 49. 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 that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And those are very hard words to hear aren't they? How can he say this?

[13 : 30] How can anyone so full of love like Jesus speak words as brutal as this? We often think don't we that the fact that there's a final judgment shows that he is bad.

No it shows that he is good. Because we long for justice to be done. Here is the promise justice will be done. He will put things right.

But by putting things right he will deal with the things which are wrong. He will deal with all that opposes his rule which means that he will deal with all the people who oppose his rule.

And I take it the reason he tells us and he tells you this morning is because he loves us. And he wants us to be part of his kingdom. And he doesn't want you to walk away this morning thinking that his kingdom is not really worth it after all.

That his kingdom is not precious. He wants you to see the sort of kingdom that you are part of. We see in the New Testament the kingdom of God what it's going to be like.

[14 : 42] And then we look around the world at poverty at sickness and injustice and we can be tempted to think that he's failed. But he's not failed. He's not yet finished.

The net is coming. He is the king. He has started the restoration project in this room. Look around you. There are people who were once rebels who've been restored to the king.

Every church that meets in the name of the Lord Jesus and calls on his name today is evidence that the resurrection that the restoration project has begun.

People are being right. Being put right. But it's not finished. And Jesus wants you and I to know that one day he will call a halt to this old world.

And one day he will sort everything out. And that is when he will wipe away every tear. And there will be no more death and no more mourning or crying or pain because the king will finally sort everything out.

[15 : 51] And we will see him face to face. And we will be with him and enjoying him in all his beauty. And we will enjoy the fact that he is our king and we belong to him.

What a blessing that will be. So do you see how Jesus is reassuring his followers this morning? You might be looking around this morning looking around at your life and thinking it is not worth following Jesus.

He's failed. But know the net is coming. One day the king will sort everything. He's not failed. He's just not finished.

And Jesus is saying in the light of that fact that the net is coming the real treasure is not that you've got a place on the team. it's not that you've got a place on the graduate scheme.

It's not even that you've got a place in the country even. The real treasure is that you've got a place in the kingdom of God. And on the day when the king comes back to sort out those who are his look what Jesus says about the people he will throw into the furnace.

[17 : 04] He says there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. it's a picture of total despair. And the fact that they were very very popular and they went to all the best parties will be no consolation to them.

They thought they had treasure but they were desperately wrong. They had trinkets. The real treasure Jesus says is when you have a place in the kingdom.

And so often those of us who are Christians those of us who are in the kingdom we look across at others and all that they seem to have and we tie ourselves in knots. And maybe we think that in following Jesus we're missing out on life and there are days when we think that and we think I don't know whether it's worth it.

I don't think he is worth it but do you see what Jesus is saying? He's saying remember the day that is to come. And if you have a place in the kingdom it may cost you friendships it may cost you promotion it may cost you your reputation if you live in certain parts of the world today it may cost you your freedom it may cost you your life but when the net comes and all the fish are sorted you will be in no doubt whatsoever that it was worth it.

as you see when we look at today in the light of the day that is to come it changes today.

[18 : 40] It's not just that one day there'll be treasure but do you see the treasure you have anticipating that breaks into the future. Think about if you're going to a gig if you've got tickets to a concert that you've been really looking forward to or you're really looking forward to the big sporting event it's not just the then that you enjoy is it?

You look forward to it you might maybe have the tickets in your hand you look forward to the then now you enjoy the fullness of the gig or the concert and the sports event then but now you enjoy the prospect of it.

the fact that you are going on holiday maybe later this week means that today is very different isn't it? You look forward to the prospect of it and Matthew has been saying to us in his gospel think of who Jesus is.

He is the king. He is the king who is all powerful all knowing and all wise and totally just and completely pure and he's gentle and he's kind and he's patient. He's the king who keeps all his promises.

He's the king who's going to sort everything out. The king of a kingdom that will last forever and it will be wonderful. He's the king who has the authority over who can and can't be part of that kingdom.

[20 : 02] And this king has forgiven you and this king loves you and this king says you are his that you are a member of his kingdom and that on that day of sorting you've got nothing to fear.

to know that you'll be with him and that you're going to enjoy him in his kingdom forever. That is precious. And that is treasure that's not just for the future.

That is a treasure that makes today different. We are rich. The kingdom of heaven is treasure and when you remember the day that is to come then Jesus says in verse 51 have you understood all these things?

Have you got what I'm talking about? Have you understood the kind of kingdom that I'm going to bring in? Have you seen why you cannot walk away? Have you seen that it is treasure? And they say verse 51 yeah.

And so Jesus says well if you have therefore every scribe who's 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.

[21 : 11] And so what he's saying secondly is this that the kingdom of heaven if the kingdom of heaven is treasure therefore share it with others. If the kingdom of heaven is treasure therefore share it with others.

That's how it goes in life isn't it? You know something is treasure if you know something is treasure you can't help but pass it on. I recently have had three lovely opportunities to speak about how great a thing Park Run is.

How it's great for children. It's good for the community. There's obvious health benefits. You can do it anywhere in the country or around the world. You can get milestone t-shirts.

You can get your stats and track your progress. That if you look at Park Run in one way it's very much like church life. In other ways it's a paradigm for Roman Catholicism I'm very good at telling people about Park Run.

About how you need to get registered and get your barcode and what you can do with your barcode. But you know I've never been on a course that helps me to explain the virtues of Park Run.

[22 : 24] I've never had training on how to speak about Park Run. It just tumbles out of my mouth. My heart is so full of it I open my mouth and I speak of it.

And what happens is when we lose the sense of the good news of the Lord Jesus being treasure our hearts are not that full so our mouths don't speak.

And what Jesus is saying here is if we understand what a treasure it is we will not be able to keep our mouths shut about it. He says if you're a teacher of the law and you've been instructed about the kingdom of heaven you're like the owner of a house and the owner of the house well he's a wealthy sort of guy.

Owners of houses in Matthew's gospel are nearly always wealthy and he's a little bit like the merchant that we looked at last week. He's built up an art collection and he's got a jewel encrusted sword from Athens.

He's got gold bracelets from Alexandria. There's this beautiful vase that he picked up in Damascus and there's a whole series of matching plates in Corinth. And these things are so beautiful that he doesn't keep them in a storeroom hidden away from people.

[23 : 41] He brings them out. He puts them on display. He shares them with everyone. One of Matthew's themes as you read through his gospel is that Jesus has come to fulfill the Old Testament.

And what Jesus is saying here is if you were an ordinary teacher of the law you would share the treasure of the law. But if you are a teacher of the law and you're instructed about the kingdom there's something new to teach.

But it's not just something new that has come along so we can bin the old. That wasn't up to much. Let's talk about the new teachings of Jesus. It's not that.

He's saying if you understand the kingdom of heaven you will teach the Old and New Testament and you'll see that the old has not been binned but it's been fulfilled by the Lord Jesus.

If you understand what I'm saying Jesus is saying I'm not just another guy who's turned up out of the blue with some new teachings that might be of some interest to some people I'm the one who's fulfilled the Old Testament.

[24 : 48] I'm the king who was promised to bring into the kingdom and if you understand how the old has been fulfilled in the new then you can't keep it to yourself you'll share it. You'll teach it.

He's telling you that Jesus is not some hobby horse that people bang on about. Maybe you're into Formula One I couldn't care less about Formula One I don't understand it. You talk to me about Formula One I'm not interested in it.

It's good for you but it's not good for me. Jesus is not like that. No he is the one that the Old Testament promised. And the one that the Old Testament promised is not some religious leader who might work for some people but not work for other people.

He is God's king over the whole world. And one day every knee will bow. And so when someone shares the Lord Jesus with you if you're not a Christian this morning they're not doing it to be pushy. It's because of who he is. The king who will gather up gather up his people.

[26 : 01] He's the one who will sort all things out. And that means not just some people who are into this sort of thing need to hear him but everyone every single person needs to hear about him.

Everyone needs to know. Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like treasure and he uses the same words in verse 52. If you understand me and my kingdom you're like the art dealer. You've got treasure and you can't keep it hidden away in a storeroom. You've got to get it out. You've got to share it. And if you do not share it, Jesus is saying you've not understood it. Because if you understand who I am, Jesus is saying, you will share it. Jesus is for everyone. It's not Jesus is helpful for me. I find him really helpful. But it's not for the person next door to me at work or my next door neighbor or my father or my neighbors. It's not really that kind of thing. If you're saying that this morning, Jesus is saying to you, you've not understood who I am.

[27 : 17] And so these disciples who said yes understood who he was and went round preaching the message of the kingdom. And most of them were killed for it. Why did they do it?

You may know this. In the 16th century, there were some young men who would leave Geneva in Switzerland to go and plant churches in France. Their life expectancy was six months. That's how hostile the reception was. In the 19th century, there were British and American missionaries who would head for West Africa and they would pack all their belongings into a coffin because they know that they would need it soon. And when the news came back that people had died and been killed, more people stepped up to go. Why? In Cambodia in 1979, when the Khmer Rouge was massacring Christians, a 14-year-old boy by the name of Chen had escaped the country and he was in a refugee camp where it was safe.

But he discovered who Jesus was and when it struck him that there were people in his village who had not heard the good news about Jesus, he decided to go back. Chen was dying of stomach cancer, he was weak and he was frail and armed with leaflets explaining the Christian message, he walked back to his village in Cambodia through minefields to tell his fellow villagers.

[28 : 49] One can hardly imagine the amazement of those villagers. With this pathetic looking little 14-year-old lad leaning on two crutches standing before them, holding out gospel tracts.

Most of them would have given all that they had to be in the place that he had just left. A secure refugee camp complete with food and medicine and possible sponsorship to America. What was it that compelled him to return? Why did he do it? Why did he do it? Because he had understood that the good news of King Jesus is a message that everyone needs. He'd understood that the net was coming. And so in the light of that day, more than anything else in the people of the world, the people of the world needed the treasure of the good news of how to be right with the King. To be ready for the day when he comes. For many of us, as I speak this morning, you, like myself, are worried what people would think.

[30 : 06] You're worried about the loss of a friendship. Worried about the demands that this puts on you. Worried about the comfort that you would have to give up.

Worried about the time that it would take to be involved in a ministry that would tell people about this. Worried maybe about what it would mean for your job. And we immediately think, don't we, what it will cost us.

Jesus says, don't think like that. If you have the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, if you have entered into the kingdom of heaven, you might lose all the trinkets of this world, but you have treasure. You have treasure. And the fact that we've forgotten its treasure means we've forgotten its value. And so we think of our friends and our family and our neighbours and our work colleagues and we think, they don't need this.

But Jesus says to you and I this morning, there's a net coming. And in the light of the net, if they do not have a place in the kingdom, they are poor.

[31 : 14] And in our storeroom, we've got the treasure that they need. The picture is encouraging, I think. Rejection often makes you stop, doesn't it?

And give up. You think people don't get it. But this little picture tells us, no, the gospel is a treasure. It is priceless. Remember the coronation service?

Take this, the most valuable thing that the world affords. The king was given a Bible. It's very striking, isn't it, that there is nothing more valuable that I can share with anyone else than the good news of Jesus.

And so pray with me that we would see the treasure that we have and that we would share it with those around us. That the Lord would fill our hearts and so we'd open our mouths.

Let's pray together. Thank you.