

Sermon for July 26, 2026
"Kingdom Economics"

Matthew 13:44-46

What's it worth to you? What would you pay for something of great value? You know by now that I am a space geek. I have avidly watched, as commercial space flight has become a reality, even if it is an expensive one. I would love to go to space. Melissa, on the other hand, would probably pay not to go into space. Of course, the costs are far beyond my budget.

For some people, however, it is not. Between 2001 and 2012 seven people paid to go into orbit. One of them went twice. Each flight costs between \$20 and \$35 million! The good news is that now for only \$250,000 you can take a two-and-a-half-hour flight out of the atmosphere and back, no orbits, but it only costs the same as a small house! If you want to vacation on the International Space Station that costs \$70 million!

However, not many are willing to pay, even if they have the money. It is a matter of worth. For a few people the experience is worth the money, for others it's not. Then of course there is the risk. Space flight does not have a great safety record. If you had the money, would you travel into space? That's the economics of commercial space flight.

There's the bottom line: what is the Kingdom of God worth to you? Some people have paid highly to follow Jesus. The disciples left thriving businesses and families to follow Jesus. John the Baptist gave his life to play his fleeting role in the Kingdom of God. St. Frances gave away all his earthly belongings to follow Jesus. Jesus gave his life to make our participation in the eternal Kingdom of God possible.

But it wasn't worth enough for some people to pay those exorbitant prices. There was a rich young man who could not give up his riches to follow Jesus. There were others who could not leave their families or lives to follow Jesus. Jesus warned that the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head, and some stopped following. Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life," and that was too hard for some.

What is the kingdom worth to you? Would you leave a good lucrative tax business like Matthew? Would you leave family and friends and the family-business like many of the disciples? Would you leave your comfort zone to serve the Lord? Would you risk being labeled a "goody-goody" or a "Jesus freak" by your peer group? I know that some of you have, and we all know there were times when each of us didn't. That's the economics of the Kingdom.

Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of God extensively in Ch. 13 of Matthew, or in Matthew's language Kingdom of Heaven. It is like someone who sowed seeds, or like a mustard seed, or like weeds sown in malice, or like yeast, or ... Then Jesus took his disciples aside and he said to them: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure buried in a field. One day a man found out about that treasure and decided to buy the field so that he could legally claim the treasure as his own. He went out and got a second mortgage on his house and cashed in his life insurance policy and closed out all his bank accounts just so that he could buy the land. That treasure was of such great value that he risked everything to get the land it was buried in."

This scenario is not as uncommon as it may sound. For many centuries before Jesus' day the Holy Land was a constant battle ground as the empires of the Nile Delta and the Fertile Crescent battled over control of the region. When people saw an army coming, they

would literally head for the hills to get out of the way. On such a trek gold and jewels would be a burden. So, they would bury their treasure in hopes of coming back and digging it up after the hostilities stopped. Often, they never came back, and it stayed buried for decades or centuries before someone discovered it.

Along the same line Jesus also said: "The kingdom of heaven was like a salesman who while on a buying trip found a very valuable pearl, and instead of just buying a few cheap pearls he decided to risk his entire business to buy that one valuable pearl. So, he called up his banker and he took out a huge loan and bought that one pearl."

That's Kingdom Economics.

But what exactly did Jesus mean when he said that this is what the Kingdom of Heaven, or of God, is like? What is the treasure or the pearl that is so valuable? Is it eternal life? Is it the truth of God revealed in Jesus? Is it the peace and hope we know in Christ? Is it having a relationship with our Heavenly Father? Is it forgiveness of our sins? Is it a ticket on that rocket ship to Heaven?

Could it be all the above? That's the most prevalent interpretation. The pearl or treasure is the Kingdom and all the perks that go with it. The question is: what are you willing to pay for it?

What is it worth to you? Some people give up their careers and wealth to follow Jesus. I was in seminary with a man who sold his computer business to go to seminary and become a preacher, and that was in the mid 1980's. Another quit her job as a philosophy professor to go back to school and get a mere master's in divinity and become a preacher. Some give up their mindset, prejudices, or worldview to follow Jesus. Some have given their very lives to follow Jesus. What is the kingdom worth to you?

But there is another way to look at these two parables. From this alternate perspective the pearl or treasure is not the Kingdom; it's you. It's not the disciples paying a great price, it is the Lord who pays a great price. God gave the only begotten Son, Jesus, to come into this world to open participation in the Kingdom to whosoever. Jesus left the glories of Heaven to come tell us of God's great love for us and what the Kingdom of God is all about. Then he gave his life to open the doors of the Kingdom of God to any who would choose to walk in.

You are a treasure; you are a pearl of great price. I don't know about you, but some days I wouldn't give plug nickel for myself. I can be selfish and thoughtless and not worth my own time. Some days I am simply not worth the trouble. Have you ever felt like that?

But Jesus thought we were worth his life. He chose to suffer and die for us! In God's eyes you are a treasure. To Jesus you are a pearl of great value, and they both paid dearly for you.

So, which is it? Is the treasure the Kingdom or is it us? Why can't it be both? That's the great thing about parables. They can mean different things from different perspectives. Often, they mean it all!

You are a treasure; a priceless pearl in God's eyes. God in Christ paid the ultimate price for your heart and soul; so, you could be liberated from the oppression of sin and death. Jesus came into this world and died for you! That is what you are worth to your Heavenly Father!

What are you willing to pay in thanksgiving for what God has done for you? How much is your gratitude worth? Will you give up your selfishness and sin? Will you dedicate yourself to loving your neighbor? Will you give your life to God in devotion and service?

You are worth everything to Jesus, what is Jesus worth to you? That's Kingdom Economics! Read your textbooks and invest your life well.