

Sermon Notes, Matt 13:44-46, Sunday 2nd Jan 2022

The cost of following Jesus

Verse 44. 46. To many people today, that is unthinkable. The idea that we might give something up in order to follow Jesus – it's madness. The idea that we might give up everything we have in order to follow Jesus – well that's just insanity.

Glad to be involved in church. But only for as long as it's convenient.

These words of Jesus are not easy to listen to in our day and age. Tempted to do one of two things with this part of the parables.

Ignore / Delete. Just a couple of charming stories. You can listen to all of Jesus' parables like that if you want. Problem is: Jesus taught in parables to filter the listeners. Many just hear them as stories, as entertainment for the ear. They invite us to scratch below the surface, to dig out what Jesus is really saying.

And when we do that with these stories we find that they're not just stories about someone who found something immensely valuable. Stories about two people willing to give up everything.

Impose / Demand. We need to be willing to pay the cost, to make the sacrifice, to do our bit for Jesus and his kingdom. I could give a stirring speech, like a general on the eve of battle, to strengthen our spines, to brace ourselves, to follow Jesus whatever it costs.

But that won't do either. Do you imagine that the man who found the treasure needed a stiff talking to?

Jesus does indeed lay out a high price for those who would follow him. Verse 44: "He sold all he had". Verse 46: "He went away and sold everything he had".

Instead, let's look more closely. I want us to notice two details in the way Jesus tells the parables that point us to these stories being unbelievably good news.

The Ambiguity about the Cast

Ask this question: Who is the man who discovered the treasure in the field? Who is the merchant looking for fine pearls?

So far, we've assumed that it's us. And it may be us. I'm not saying that we're not meant to identify with the men in the two stories. I'm saying it's ambiguous. Parables are meant to make you ponder. Let's chew over these ones a little.

Look at all the other parables in Matthew chapter 13. Who is the protagonist in the parables of Matthew 13? Each one tells a story? Whose story? Who is it that is trying to achieve something? Who's project is the story following?

Sower. Weeds. Mustard Seed. Yeast.

So all the other parables in Matthew 13 are a story about what Jesus is doing. One key principle in reading the Bible properly is to remember that it's not first and foremost a story about us. It's a story about God and his plan. We fit into God's story, but it's his story not ours.

Which means our first guess: These two parables are also about Jesus. Jesus sold all that he had and bought the field. Jesus saw a single pearl, sold everything he had and bought it. Which means that we are the treasure hidden in the field. We are the pearl of great value.

If you are a Christian, Jesus Christ looked at you, and decided that he wanted you in his kingdom more than he had ever wanted anything. The only way he could have you was to give up everything he had. That was the price he would have to pay to buy you.

Philippians 2:5-8. Acts 20:28. That was the price tag, and he paid it joyfully. Verse 44: "In his joy, ..."

These two short parables tell the story of the whole Bible. We sing about this in our hymns.

These are not in the first place parables about what Jesus asks you to give up for him. They are parables about what he has given up for you. An act of divine madness. Welcome to the love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The joy of the finder

As I say, it's ambiguous who the finder is. If it is about Jesus, it's also about us. This isn't a zero-sum game, where to the extent that it's about Jesus it's not about us. It almost certainly is a case of "both-and".

Parable of sower: Call to endure great hardship (rocky soil), call to prize Jesus most highly (weeds).

So when Jesus tells these two stories, we already know he's talking about us too. The emotion of this story. Did not feel like a sacrifice to have the one thing they wanted. Covid Quarantine

Maybe you read these parables, and your reaction is the mechanic's sharp intake of breath. You find yourself thinking, "sounds expensive". The solution is not to beat yourself up. The solution is not masochism. It's not grin and bear it.

The solution is to look again at the Lord Jesus. To read his word. To look at him from every angle you can. Until he becomes the one thing, the one person that you simply have to have in your life, because you're so captivated by him.

Who could want anything more than ...

To be attached to this Jesus. To know this Jesus. To see this Jesus. To live for this Jesus? What could possibly be better? Do you have anything in your life that is more precious than that, more precious than him? Surely not!

Conclusion

When Christian life sounds expensive, don't ignore, don't impose. See that it's because you are expensive – and Jesus loved you and gave himself for you. And because Jesus is valuable – and he's the most precious thing in the whole world.

Hebrews 12:1-3.