

INTRO:

Alright friends, come on back... Hope that gave you a chance to just enjoy something of the *simple hospitality* we want to characterize these gatherings, before hopefully, we experience something of the *surprising grace* of God in His word... As a kid, I was fascinated with the story of Mel Fisher and his discovery of the Atocha. The Atocha, you might know, was a Spanish Gallon ship that sailed to what is now Key West Florida in 1622, when Spain was looking to colonize the West. And as a part of that colonization project Spain shipped pounds-and-pounds of gold to the New World. The Atocha was a part of that shipment. Actually, the rear guard ship of a 22 ship fleet... that was unexpectedly sunk by a hurricane on September 6, 1622. And unfortunately for Spain, the Atocha was filled with/get this, an estimated \$400 million worth of gold bullion NOW just sitting at the bottom of the ocean. And obviously without modern day search and rescue technology, along with the fact that other hurricanes continued to scatter the wreckage, the Atocha was never recovered... UNTIL in 1971 a man by the name of Mel Fisher decided he was gonna dedicate his life to finding that 350 year old treasure... which he did in 1985! I've actually been to the museum down in Florida where much of the gold is displayed. But honestly, Fisher's story is, in some senses, heart-breaking, BECAUSE in his, over 15 years of searching, he lost his eldest son, his daughter-in-law, a beloved Crew Member, was married and divorced multiple-times-over and spent years in legal battles with the state of Florida. And YET, Fisher did not count any of that as loss. Every day for 15 years, he would actually tell his divers the same thing before they entered the waters. He'd say, "*Today is the day.*" To him/right or wrong, *there was no sacrifice too great if it meant finding that treasure!*

We are continuing our *Upside Down* series and TODAY looking at two similar parables, that make one distinct point. And that is: That there is **Nothing Greater**... than the treasure that is the Kingdom/the Gospel of Jesus Christ! What these parables are gonna show you is that: Whether you stumble upon the Gospel in an unexpected place like a field filled with rodents, weeds, sinkholes, and thorn bushes OR like Mel Fisher you're in search of that something greater in life, the response is same: When you find the Gospel, ya realize there's *nothing greater* and no sacrifice is too much if it means laying ahold of it!... So follow along as we hear the reading of Jesus' *Parables of The Hidden Treasure and Pearl of Great Value*: **Lise Ann** reads...

TEXT:¹

Hey, can we thank BOTH **Lise Ann** AND God for the reading of His Word?... So two very similar parables BOTH making the same point. Cuz in the first one, we're told that a man finds a treasure in a field. In Jesus' time finding treasure in fields was not ALL that uncommon BECAUSE you had BOTH lots of un-developed land, no banks AND because as happened quite often in Israel, when invading armies would attack they'd confiscate all your possessions. So if you had any forewarning OF an attack, what you'd do is bury your possessions BEFORE it and usually usually in nasty/rodent/weed-filled fields where no one would want to look. Unfortunately and obviously, many who buried treasure BEFORE attacks weren't always around

¹ A large portion of this message adapted from various thoughts and insights provided by "7. Out In Left Field (Parables #4)" - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000520310917> + "Hidden Treasure" // Matthew 13:44-46 // Listen #2" - J.D. Greear + "How to Find Real Treasure: Jesus—On Finding God—November 1, 1998: Matthew 13:44-46" - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

AFTER attacks, which meant/quite frequently, you'd have buried treasure throughout the land. The point is two-fold: **First**, in telling this parable, Jesus is speaking to a people who understood what it was like to find treasure in a field. So you can imagine, AS He's speaking everybody's kinda leaning in going, *"oh I know what He's talkin' bout. This is gonna be good."* But **Second**, remember as we've seen throughout this series: Jesus is speaking in universal terms with these parables. Ya know, farmers and sowers representing God; seed, leaven, TREASURE here representing the Kingdom, and soil, dough, FIELDS here...representing US/the world. And that's important to note, because in some senses, Jesus is not only giving a commentary ON us - like dirty, neglected fields, we too/if we're honest, KNOW we're FILLED with dirtiness - BUT more importantly, He's giving a commentary on God's goodness: That God would actually dare to allow the treasure, that is His Son, to be buried among our nastiness. As **Philippians 2** says it: *"Jesus emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."* You understand, no other religion has that! Has a God who doesn't call us UP to Himself if only we can get our acts together, but rather comes down into our mess precisely because we CAN'T get our acts together! As Martyn Lloyd Jones used to say, *"Loves YOU, NOT because you're lovely, but makes you lovely, BECAUSE He loves you!"*

So you got this man who finds a treasure in a field! And obviously, there's a bit of an ethical dilemma here, cuz taking the treasure would obviously be stealing, and telling the owner of it would obviously cause the man to lose out ON it. SO we're told he reburies it and liquidates everything he has in order to buy the WHOLE field! And I love that Jesus includes those two details of the man liquidating ALL his assets AND buying the WHOLE field, BECAUSE it just shows that this guy isn't thinking in terms of financial risk assessments or investment opportunity, where like a developer you only purchase a sub-divided plot of land because you know THAT'S the money-maker plot. No! This is a man who's treating this field like you'd treat a big purchase on Ebay. Ya know, if you've ever bid for something on Ebay, you know you can set your bid-limit so that your account auto-bids for you up to a certain limit. It's so that you don't get out-bid. THIS guy has removed the bid-limit! He's going with an ALL-cash offer, NO contingencies, waving the home assessment AND telling his realtor, if anyone comes in with a better offer, I'll match it and go \$100k over. In other words, **No sacrifice is too great** BECAUSE/here's the key: Jesus says, he did this... *"in his joy."* Like normally, if you've ever made a big purchase/property or something, you know there's always nerves right? Always that moment/unless you're independently wealthy or something, where ya go, *"I hope I can afford this."* Not to mention: If you walked away from EVERYTHING you owned/even IF you believed that what you were purchasing was valuable, you'd be pretty devastated. But not this guy. He's filled with joy, because he realizes there's **nothing greater and no sacrifice too much** if it means getting this treasure! Jesus says, THAT is what it's like to get the kingdom/the Gospel.

But then you see, He gives a second parable/just in case we didn't totally track with the first. And it essentially makes the same point AS the first BUT with a few differences: Cuz on the one hand, while we aren't told much about the man in the field, a number of commentators/I think rightly-so have deduced that he was probably a common/even poor man, GIVEN that if he was

messin' about in an abandoned field/certainly if he was working that field, he's prolly not a man of means...WHICH is in contrast to this pearl merchant. We know from history that pearl merchants were people of incredible wealth. Pearls were the most valuable jewel in the ancient world, mainly cuz they were so hard to get. So to be a person dedicated to searching for pearls required significant/AND continual capital...So two very different TYPES of people here...But ALSO two very different ways in which they each get their treasure. Cuz notice, for the man in the field, he literally STUMBLES over it/finds a treasure in a field. The merchant though is very clearly SEARCHING for treasure/has dedicated his livelihood to finding pearls...TO THE POINT THAT, when he finds this "*pearl of great value*," look at what he does: He cashes in! Literally sells everything/every other pearl he's ever found/even his pearl-hunting business, to buy it! Think about that: Like Mel Fisher, if what you do is treasure-hunting, that's probably more than a job for you. It's probably a passion! This guy literally quits his passion BECAUSE in a sense, this "*pearl of great value*" has satisfied everything he's ever been about!...Two very different people, finding treasure in two very different ways. And yet, BOTH responding by giving up everything to get it! THAT, Jesus says, is like discovering the Kingdom/the Gospel!

APPLICATION:

So what do we learn ABOUT the Kingdom/the Gospel here: 4 really important principles: **First, The Gospel Is Hidden:** In Jesus equating the Kingdom/the Gospel to treasure hidden in a field and a merchant in-search of hidden pearls, He's telling us that the Gospel is, not so much hidden in terms of not being able to be found, since obviously both men find it - but hidden in the sense of: most people just miss it! Earlier in **Matthew 10** Jesus had prayed, "*Father God, you've hidden these things from the wise and the learned and revealed them to the childlike.*" There's always been a sense with the Gospel that our intellect/our wit that we think is sufficient for discerning how life works, and what's it's about, and who God is/ya know, these big meta questions...is actually INSufficient. Like, in many respects, you understand, your intellect can KEEP you from laying ahold of the Gospel WHEN it serves NOT to lead you to trust Jesus, but to have to figure out everything ABOUT Jesus before you're willing to TRUST Jesus. That's why we see so many brilliant people MISS Jesus. It's not cuz the Gospel is anti-intellectual. It's cuz the Gospel is anti-individual! Against you and me thinking we can find God by our own thinking/or effort of any kind. In fact, Jesus deliberately insists that if you're gonna find Him, you're gonna have to get over needing to understand everything before you trust and obey Him. The Gospel, you see, is not work-it-all out, deduce-it, rationalize it AND THEN trust. It's trust and THEN watch how IT works out everything. As C.S. Lewis famously said, "*I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.*" Most of us miss the **hiddenness** of the Gospel because we kinda refuse to believe that it would be as accessible as to just need to be received...I love the way Tim Keller describes it. He calls this guy in the field, "*Old Joe*" /says, "*One of the reasons why everybody is (probably) laughing at old Joe...is cuz nobody would believe that a treasure could be THAT accessible, as to just be able to stumble upon it.*" AND YET, that's what the Gospel is: It's the message that we don't think our way, work our way, or earn our way into God's favor. Actually we don't DO anything. What WE do is trust Him who's DONE everything. As **Ephesians 2** says, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith. Not your own doing; it's the gift of God, not a*

result of works, so that no one can boast.” And I know that’s SO hard for us to accept/can be so **hidden** that we say it’s either myth, fairytale, a crutch for non-thinking people OR/as we can unfortunately do in the church; receive it, but then add to it! Say, “*sure, salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. BUT spiritual growth/sanctification/your staying in good standing with God/well that depends on your effort.*” In other words, somewhere along the way, we move OFF the finished work of Christ and ONTO “*to be continued.*” The “treasure in the field” becoming a land-development project, and the “pearl” becoming an investment portfolio. But Friends, the **hiddenness** of the Gospel is that God’s blessing FOR you doesn’t depend ON you, but on Jesus who’s lived and died INSTEAD of you!... **The Gospel Is Hidden!**

Second, The Gospel Is The Greater Joy:...Despite how different these two men are, they still BOTH give up everything right? And not cuz they HAVE to, but cuz they WANT to. **Let me ask you:** Is that how you think about the Gospel? As something that brings you so much joy that all else pales in comparison?...I’ll be honest with you: I’ve wrestled with that this week. I don’t know bout you, but I can easily think of my relationship with Christ as this kind of never-ending-to-do list of things I constantly feel guilty about. Maybe YOU think about Jesus as, ya know, the thing that kinda keeps you from doing ALL the other things you REALLY wanna do. I know for many, trusting Jesus is just about/they think, making a “smart spiritual decision.” Ya know, trusting Jesus for the “get-out-of-Hell-free” card...But obviously, responses like those just show how little we understand about what God’s offering us IN Jesus! Cuz understand, God isn’t against your happiness! **How many have you heard someone say, “God’s more about your holiness than your happiness!”** And look, that’s true. God IS about your holiness. But you understand, holiness and happiness aren’t mutually exclusive. Holiness is the KEY to happiness! Because in being holy your happiness gets purified AWAY from fleeting, temporary joys and pleasures that only leave you empty and sorrowful, TO joys that are lasting and eternal BECAUSE they’re wrapped up in Jesus! God isn’t against your happiness. If He was there’d be no mention of these two men JOYFULLY selling everything to get the kingdom. What He’s against is a happiness that won’t ultimately...make you happy! Think about it like this: Imagine on my wedding day, Abby and I are at the altar and the Pastor says, “*Abby repeat after me: I Abby...I Abby...hereby renounce all desire for romance, intimacy and happiness in order to become Charlie’s wife.*” I’d be like, “*Yo! That aint what I want.*” I don’t want her/you wouldn’t want your spouse to forsake those things for you. You’d want em to find them IN you! It’s the same with Jesus. He doesn’t want you to forsake happiness. He wants you to find lasting happiness in Him! As He said in **John 15:11** after having given that amazing analogy of life with Him being like a vine and branches, “*These things I’ve spoken to you SO THAT my joy may be in you, and your joy may be full.*” **The Gospel IS The Greater Joy.** So the question you oughta be asking yourself is NOT, “*have you accepted Christ*” or “*do you have a personal relationship with Jesus,*” but “*has Jesus become your treasure/your joy?*”

Third, The Gospel/That Greater Joy Is For Anyone: And we’ve already touched on this a bit, but it’s obvious right, that the guy in the field and the pearl-merchant are VERY different people. Again, one’s poor; the other rich. One dealing with a land-owner who really doesn’t know the value of his land and what’s in it, while the other is buying a pearl from a dealer who clearly

knows it possesses, as it says, “*great value.*” One stumbles upon a treasure while the other is seeking it. Just two very different people here! And I think that’s intentional by Jesus, because in some senses, what He’s saying is/listen: Whether you’re going through life right now, in SEARCH of something greater - maybe cuz you realize that no matter how fit ya get, or successful you are, or how many possessions you have, relationships you’re in, experiences you enjoy, that none of it TRULY satisfies - so you’re searching...OR you’re just kinda stumbling through life - maybe lacking passion/direction - in other words, whether you’re seeking or stumbling/like the pearl-merchant or the man in the field - Jesus is trying to tell you: the Gospel/HE is for YOU, cuz **He’s for anyone! Do you believe that? And if you do:** Do you therefore see those around you NOT through a lens of race, politics, education, class, or gender or something, but a lens of needing Jesus and Jesus being for them? **The Gospel Is For Anyone!**

Fourth and Finally, The Gospel Requires Total Surrender: Ya know, the image of these two men turning FROM everything they have TO a treasure is such a wonderful one, cuz it’s really the image of surrender/or what the Bible calls repentance. And I say wonderful cuz I think so often we assume repentance is like this bitter turn away from really awesome stuff that, were it not for Jesus, you’d love to do, but know ya shouldn’t, so ya turn away and begrudgingly turn to Jesus! But, you understand, that’s not repentance! It’s certainly not what these men do. These men say, “*we’ll turn from/give up anything in order to GET THAT thing!*” In other words, there’s nothing they won’t let go of if it means getting ahold of the treasure. Cuz that’s the requirement! The requirement is no requirements. No conditions. No greater joys...The same is true with Jesus. As has often been said, *He’s either Lord of all or He’s not Lord AT all.* And that’s hard for us. Cuz most of us are cool with Jesus/even want Jesus in our lives, IF we don’t have to give up too much. In other words, we’re kinda like monkeys in the Philippines. Some years ago I learned that IN the Philippines they have to trap monkeys, cuz apparently they’re a pretty big nuisance. And so the way they do it is with coconuts. A trapper will dig a hole in a tree or something that’s just a tiny bit bigger than a coconut. And then they’ll place a coconut in the hole. So when a monkey/wanting a coconut comes along, it reaches in the hole, grabs the coconut, but NOW with it’s fist clutching the coconut, it’s hand is too big to pull back out of the hole. So it’s trapped. Now of course, all the monkey has to do is let go of the coconut to be free. But they don’t. Why? Because they fear losing the coconut. SO they keep struggling, all the while, not knowing that they’re about to lose their freedom.² ***Aren’t we just like that?*** Fear losing some person, or pleasure, or thing that we’re gripped by, and so we say to Jesus, “*Jesus, I’ll surrender...as long as you don’t make me give up...X*” To which Jesus of course says, “*but then that’s not surrender/repentance.*” Cuz repentance means no conditions, no requirements, turning FROM what you used to treasure to HIM as your ultimate treasure! And by the way, if you don’t know what it is that you treasure, just ask yourself: *Where does your mind go when you don’t have anything else to think about?/when you can sorta daydream?* Or conversely: *What do you have nightmares about? Fear losing the most?...* Whatever THAT is, is your treasure. And Jesus says, “*you can have that...you just can’t have ME in competition WITH that.*” And not because He’s trying to keep you from enjoying good things, but because He knows, as C.S. Lewis said, there’s first

² Illustration from <https://www.businessinsider.com/what-navy-seal-sniper-fears-more-than-waterboarding-2018-8>

things and second things. And when you put first things first, you get both first and second things. But when you put second things first, ya lose both first and second things: Like a jar full of rocks and pebbles. If you put the rocks in first, then you can drop the pebbles in around and fill in the cracks. But if you put the pebbles in first, the rocks won't fit...Friend, Jesus is your rock/your hidden treasure/your greater joy. And so He says, *"For your good, let me be first in everything/surrender to me, and I promise I'll fit everything else in!"* ...Ya see? **The Gospel Is Hidden; It's The Greater Joy; It's For Anyone; But It Requires Total Surrender.** And in that: There really is **Nothing Greater!...Let's Pray...Amen!**