

Intro

What do Americans treasure? On their website, the University of Portland in Oregon provides a guide for international students, clueing them in on what to expect when they come to campus. Here are some of the values they think America prizes:

- 1) Individualism: separate individuals rather than members of a community
- 2) Equality: whether racial or male/female
- 3) Informality: for example, informal speech, dress, and posture
- 4) The Future, Change, and Progress: lack of concern for history and tradition...desire for social change
- 5) Achievement, Action, Work, and Materialism: desire to achieve something measureable
- 6) Directness and Assertiveness: speaking openly and directly about viewpoints...not guarded in our emotional responses
- 7) Time: a valuable resource to use wisely

Are these things you treasure? Do you treasure something else? This morning we consider our treasure. What is it that delights us? What drives our lives? This morning we ask this question:

BIG IDEA: How should we respond to the good news of the kingdom?

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

RECAP

- Chapter 13 explains kingdom rejection: 4 soils...Isaiah's ministry
- Parables
 - 1) Parables = stories containing spiritual truth that call for a response
 - 2) Revelation given to disciples and withheld from religious establishment and the curious crowds
- Revealing kingdom mysteries
 - 1) Mystery = something hidden but now revealed = a spiritual kingdom of heaven that would start out small and gradually expand over time to be followed by an eternal kingdom
- "He who has ears, let him hear" = who am I in the story?

Passage Focus

Jesus' concluding remarks to his disciples about the kingdom of heaven

FCF: pursuit of lesser things (13:22)

Grace given: kingdom revealed

Gospel connection: what we prize most drives our behavior...the gospel realigns our affections

Point 1: Prize the kingdom of heaven above everything else (13:44-46)

Explanation

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." – 13:44

Before banks people buried their valuables in the ground to protect them. A likely scenario would be a man works for a landowner and in the course of his duties he stumbles upon a hidden treasure in the field. How did the treasure get there? Perhaps the previous landowner died and with his death, knowledge of the treasure and its location perished also. If the current landowner knew treasure was buried in their field, surely they wouldn't sell that particular field. So having discovered a secret buried treasure, the worker immediately buries the treasure so that no one else will find it. Then he sells everything he owns to buy the field where the treasure was buried. Now the field is legally his, and along with the field comes the treasure.

Jesus isn't commenting on the legality or morality of the action. His point isn't the ethics of discovering buried treasure. That's another issue altogether. Jesus is using a common occurrence in his day to illustrate how we should **prize the kingdom of heaven above everything else.**

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it." – 13:45-46

"Again" indicates the second parable is similar to the first. This time the kingdom is compared to a merchant seeking out fine pearls. The pearl of great value represents the kingdom. The kingdom is so valuable it's worth giving up everything to acquire it.

This time, instead of unintentionally stumbling upon the kingdom, this merchant is intentionally seeking after fine pearls. When he finds what he's looking for, he sells everything he has and buys the pearl. This pearl is so valuable he must possess it regardless of the cost. Also note the merchant acted promptly to secure the pearl.

The main idea of these parables is that the kingdom is so valuable that we should give up everything to acquire it. **Prize the kingdom of heaven above everything else.**

A number of secondary ideas inform this main idea:

- 1) The kingdom is more valuable than anything else we could possess: like a treasure or a precious pearl
- 2) Hidden = obscured and alludes back to the inability of the scribes and Pharisees and the curious crowds to see and to hear
- 3) A joy producer...that drives sacrifice (he gives up all that he has)

- 4) Something found by effort and searching
- 5) When discovered appropriate action should be taken immediately

Application

Some stumble upon the kingdom. Others seek out the kingdom. There is a sense in which the kingdom is hidden in our culture. People don't seek the kingdom because Satan has blinded their eyes (2 Cor 4:4). In God's place, we seek after God replacements. 1 John 2:16 calls them "*the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions.*" Preoccupation with lesser pursuits hides the kingdom.

These parables prompt us to ask, what do I treasure? Are there things I treasure more than Jesus?

I have said, **prize the kingdom of heaven above everything else.** If we have a tendency towards God replacements, "*the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions,*" what drives treasuring the kingdom? The answer is found in our text. It's called joy. Delight. Treasuring.

In Matthew, a number of things crowd out the priority of the kingdom. These include concern for basic needs (6:25-34), family (10:34-37), tradition (15:1-9), possessions (19:16-26), and prestige and power (23:5-7).

- Disproportional focus on basic needs takes our focus off of kingdom priorities. We neglect our souls, our brothers and sisters, and our mission in the world. Having financial security drives us.
- Disproportional focus on family obscures the kingdom. Maybe its slavery to the family opinion that hinders allegiance to Jesus. Maybe its preoccupation with family to the neglect of kingdom priorities.
- Slavery to tradition prevents kingdom living. Is a practice based on careful interpretation and application of Scripture? If so, never discard it. Is a tradition unsubstantiated by Scripture? Don't be bound by it. The scribes and Pharisees clung to their tradition at the cost of losing the kingdom. Don't let tradition stand in the way of kingdom mission.
- Slavery to possessions prevents kingdom living. When possessions rule our hearts, Jesus won't. Possessions in proper proportion meet our basic needs, finance kingdom mission, meet the needs of others, and allow us to enjoy God's creation.

- Slavery to prestige and power prevent kingdom living. For the scribes and Pharisees, embracing Jesus required forsaking extrabiblical traditions and giving up their power and prestige. Following Jesus would require becoming humble followers rejected by the religious establishment instead of being the ones everyone looked to and honored.

Kingdom living is hard because it's counter-cultural. The Jews in Jesus' day had tradition, popular opinion, and family blocking the way to Jesus. Today we have manmade creeds, popular opinion, and family or friends blocking kingdom pursuit. And kingdom living is hard because we battle sin in our hearts. Competing desires in us fight against what God wants, like desire for possessions. There's a war within us. Our flesh battles the Spirit. **[external and internal threats to our joy in God]**

What drives kingdom living? The text says it's joy: "*in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*" Joy in Jesus and his kingdom drives out love for inferior things. Our obedience should be driven by delight.

Illustration

John Piper gives the illustration of a husband bringing roses to his wife for their anniversary. The wife expresses gratitude and asks why.

What if the husband responds, "Because it's my duty...because that's what husbands are supposed to do...because I read it in a book?"

What if the husband responds, "Because I delight to bring you roses...because I treasure you...because you're so important to me that I take pleasure in giving you these flowers?"

So it is with God. We can obey because we're supposed to or because we love Jesus and treasure him above everything else. Like we can evangelize out of guilt or because we treasure Jesus and his gospel. The apostle Paul came to the point where he gave up tradition, prestige, and power "*because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*"

Philippians 3:8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

Meditate on the value of knowing Jesus. In the gospel we have peace with God. God adopts us despite our rebellion. In the gospel we have newness of life to overcome inferior and destructive pleasures. In the gospels we have the expectation of a coming kingdom where sin and death and suffering cease. Feed on gospel truths to fuel your joy. Confess where you practically treasure other things above Jesus. Ask God to open your eyes and heart so that you treasure Jesus more.

Joy in the kingdom causes us to seek the kingdom above everything else:

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness first means to seek to bring our lives under God's rule and live according to kingdom ethics = sanctification = growing in Christlikeness in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Or growing in joy in God while our love for the world and its God-substitutes diminishes. And fulfilling the callings God has given to us. Delighting in doing the work God has assigned to us. We care for family as an overflow of our delight in God, not because family has superseded God. Family in its proper proportion. Joy in God drives love for family. Joy in God frees us from bondage to family expectations that conflict with following Jesus. Joy in God is the root of Christian obedience.

We pursue the kingdom because we **prize the kingdom of heaven above everything else**. We prize the kingdom because we delight in it.

Point 2: Proclaim the kingdom of heaven (13:47-52)

Explanation

Jesus asks his disciples if they understood the parables he taught. They said, “yes.” Then Jesus instructs:

"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." – 13:52

Jesus speaks of scribes trained for the kingdom of heaven. Jewish scribes were the learned scholars and teachers of Scripture. They interpreted the law, taught doctrine, and applied Scripture. They were guardians of the Jewish oral tradition. Who might these scribes be? Well, they are disciplined scribes (“*trained for the kingdom of heaven*”). Given his audience, the scribes are Jesus’ disciples, people trained for the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is speaking to a broad group of disciples (see 13:36), so these scribes aren’t limited to the apostles or church leadership. Any of Jesus’ disciples are a scribe trained for the kingdom of heaven. This means that you and I are scribes “trained for the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus’ disciples are compared to a master of a house who brings out treasure. The treasure they bring out is both new and old. The picture is a master who takes from his wealth and possessions and distributes them to others. He distributes both newly acquired items and things he’s had in his possession for quite some time. What does this mean?

The new = Jesus’ kingdom teachings. Teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) that contradicted Pharisaic interpretation. God isn’t satisfied with refraining from murder. He also wants to drive out hate and replace it with love for our enemies. And the kingdom teaching of chapter 13. The kingdom is already – not yet. God’s redemptive rule is active today. Sinners are being rescued from the domain of darkness and being transferred to the kingdom (Col 1:13-14). And God’s kingdom is future. One day God’s people will reign in the kingdom and sin and death and suffering will be gone forever.

The old = God’s revelation found in the OT. We dispense the whole storyline of Scripture, not just the old like the scribes and Pharisees. And not just the new like some early heretics who did away with the OT.

Three applications

First, retain the OT. A common error is that in the OT God was harsh and unloving whereas the NT God is loving and merciful. This is false.

In the OT God is certainly wrathful, but he’s also merciful:

Exodus 34:6-7 The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

In the NT God is certainly loving, but he’s also wrathful. See 13:47-50.

What I’m saying is that God never changes. His being, his character is always the same. Theologians call this the immutability of God. God is the same today as he was in the OT era. I’m saying this so that you don’t scrap the OT.

The OT pointed to Jesus and promised Jesus. Jesus came in fulfillment of OT promises. OT = promise. NT = fulfillment. Both new and old are critical.

Second, proclaim the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). As a scribe trained in the kingdom of heaven, dispense the whole storyline of Scripture: creation → fall → redemption → consummation, both new and old. Creation → fall → redemption → consummation is one tool in your proclamation toolbox. Another is God → man → Christ → response. Proclaim new and old.

Third, proclaim joyfully. The gospel is the good news that Christ died for our sins (substitutionary atonement), he was buried, and he was raised on the third day (1 Cor 15:3-4). The gospel is the good news of forgiveness of sins, a cleansed conscience, freedom from guilt and shame, peace with God. The gospel is the good news of rescue from sin's power in this life. The gospel is the good news of a coming kingdom where sin and death and suffering will be gone forever. We respond to God's offer of forgiveness by trusting God's promise of forgiveness, and because of that trust, we turn from sin (repentance).

Back to proclaiming joyfully. We shouldn't be proclaiming merely out of duty, or guilt, or because the pastor said it. We should proclaim because we want to. Because we delight in the kingdom and treasure it above all things. And because we treasure the gospel, we proclaim the gospel joyfully. If we treasure Jesus above all things, isn't it natural to proclaim him?

Conclusion

The Christian life is a process of treasuring Jesus more and more, and treasuring the world and its God-substitutes less and less.

What fuels our proclamation? Compassion (Matt 9:36-38), confidence (Matt 10:11-13 = some are worthy; Matt 13:31-33), and delight.

And compassion, confidence, and delight drive courage.

Prize the kingdom of heaven above everything else. Proclaim the kingdom of heaven.
Because Jesus and his kingdom is your treasure.