

Real Riches

Today's world places great value on money and its close relative 'celebrity'. From films and TV shows we hear "Show me the money!".

Whatever our aspirations, we are encouraged to know what we want from life and then to go after it. In fact, this also applies to very worthy personal goals, such as helping the needy, being a good parent or supporting the community. In each case, we are used to the idea of putting effort and focus into the right things – getting our priorities fixed.

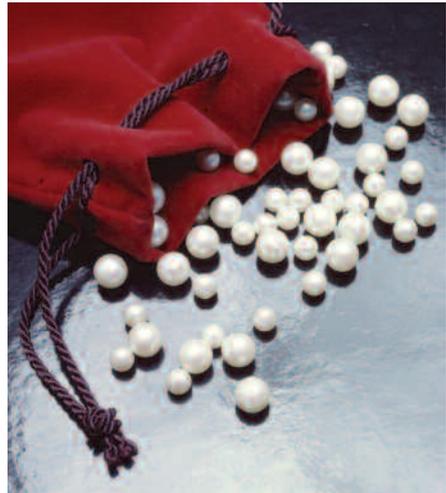
Stories of Discovery

In Matthew 13:44–46, Jesus introduces us to two men who did just this. They saw something of real worth and did what they needed to, in order to get hold of it.

The first man found treasure in a field, seemingly by chance. He recognised its value and quickly made sure that he wouldn't lose it while he purchased the field. It's clear that he really wanted the treasure; he went off with excitement and joy, and didn't hold back when he had to sell everything he had so that he could afford to buy the field. Can we imagine anything so precious, that we would exchange everything we have to get it? He did, and he was happy about it, thankful he had come across this wonderful fortune.

The second man was actually looking for something of value. He was a specialist merchant, looking for beautiful pearls. When he came across that particular pearl, the amazingly valuable one, he too sold all he had,

and bought it. Now this was a man who knew his business, who was already trading in pearls, and recognised something so exceptional that it was worth all of his goods and wealth put together. The cool, calculating businessman had made the deal of his life and committed everything to it.



The Real Value

Jesus told these stories as parables of the kingdom of God, starting each with "*the kingdom of heaven is like*". They come in a sequence of parables about the response, lifestyle and priorities now, of those people who will form part of the future kingdom of God (or 'the kingdom of heaven', the two terms are interchangeable) when Jesus returns to the earth.

The good news (the 'glad tidings') of the kingdom of God is shown as something of huge value to those who find it. Some of us find it almost by acci-

dent, through a casual word from a friend or something we happen to read. Others of us may search for years, sure that there is something of worth but taking time to identify it.

However we come across the Bible's true message, we find something of infinite worth, far more precious even than treasure or pearls. Why can we say this?

For Today and the Future

The Apostle Paul helps us here when he writes that trying to be godly has *"the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come"* (1 Timothy 4:8).

The Bible message gives us purpose, direction and perspective in this life. We can understand the world and our place in it, and we can face whatever difficulties it presents with perspective and the knowledge that a loving God cares for us.

Then the gospel gives us hope for the future, to be part of the kingdom of God and to worship Him for ever in a perfect world.

Hold On To It

Having found this precious hope, we need to follow the example of the men in Jesus' parables and do whatever we need to take hold of it.

Later in the first letter to Timothy, Paul has this advice: *"lay hold on eternal life"* (1 Timothy 6:12). It is a strong phrase and means to seize, hold on to or take possession of; exactly what Jesus was talking about. A modern example might be a rugby tackle, where the person throws themselves into it and holds on until they have full control of their target. Paul refers to his own experience:

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3:7-8).

Paul had a great profile in the religious world of the Jews, and would even have enjoyed a certain celebrity status. Yet he turned his back on all that because his priority was to 'gain Christ'.

Being Valuable to God

In the Old Testament, God spoke through the prophet Malachi to give comfort to people who were trying to do the right thing. We are told that they feared and respected God and His message. They spoke to one another about their faith. God heard and He promised to remember them, especially when He sends Jesus to set up the kingdom.

"They shall be mine," says the Lord of hosts, "On the day that I make them my jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him" (Malachi 3:17).

Let's give the Lord Jesus the final word on this. He tells us not to worry about life now, but to focus on the kingdom of God and to trust Him:

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Matthew 6:33).

Editor