

The Great Exchange
Sunday, August 9, 2020
10th Week of Kingdomtide
Matthew 13:44-46
Week 5 God's Absolute Truths

Life is precious. Our human life is absolutely precious to God. We are each created uniquely by God. God loves every single person. God breathed life into every single one of us. Yet God also gave life to all the plants, animals, and sea creatures on our planet. All of life is precious to God, but God has clearly demonstrated that human life is more precious than the animal and plant life. God created the universe for us. Scripture backs this up. (Genesis 1 and 2)

Human life is precious enough to God, that God came to dwell upon the earth as a human being in the form of Jesus Christ. This is the greatest evidence there is demonstrating how much we mean to God.

In the parables we read this morning, Jesus tells the crowd that there will be some people who seek the kingdom of heaven, equating this as a hidden treasure or a valuable pearl. When they discover the kingdom of heaven they are willing to sell everything they have in order to gain the kingdom.

Now we tend to think of heaven as our eternal reward and the place we will end up at when our lives here come to an end. But in these two parables, I think Jesus is saying that the kingdom is not just for eternal rewards. I think Jesus is talking about experiencing the kingdom while we still live this life on earth. Another way to put this is to say that we are experiencing our salvation and it begins with this life on earth and continues into eternity.

Consider what Jesus said to his disciples a little while after teaching this parable to them:

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done." (Matthew 16:24-27)

So Jesus' followers must lose their lives in order to gain new life. They must be willing to leave the old life behind in order to live into the new life that Christ has planned for them.

Now the first time we surrender our lives to Christ is normally a special time in our lives. I dare say that most of us here has surrendered our lives over to Christ. But this is not a one-time experience folks. If we have truly made Christ the Lord of our lives, then our lives are going to experience change and we will have more opportunities to make Christ the Lord of our lives.

A life in Christ is precious, valuable, holds many blessings, many of which are not materialistic. Yet, because life is constantly changing, we can't cling to what was. This coronavirus is a good example. Life has changed because of this virus. There are some who have been able to make changes in their lives, exchanging something valuable to gain something more. For many of you, it's the exchange of a "busy, dare I say, noisy" life for a quieter, more contemplative life. Giving up a plethora of activities and discovering more peace, joy, and harmony within your own home. There are families who are discovering the benefits of working from home and their lives are taking on some different changes because of this. Are all of these changes going to last? Hopefully not. We are hoping there will be a vaccine and solid treatments for those who have compromised health conditions so they can recover.

With Christ as our Lord, we can surrender this situation over to him, and look to him for guidance with each of our lives. A year from now, life will look very different once again. By surrendering our life over to Jesus, we will continue to discover the new pearl or treasure in the next chapter that the Lord leads us into.

When we make Christ our Lord, we are saying that we are embracing his lessons and values for life that are found in our Bible. The kingdom of heaven on earth incorporates these lessons and values. There are those who say that Christ is their Lord, but they haven't made that kind of commitment to his kingdom on earth. They say Jesus is their Lord, but they are still pursuing worldly values of wealth, prestige and power; or they are clinging to their wealth, prestige, and power.

True disciples of Christ will sacrifice wealth, prestige, and power in order to gain peace, love, and joy. A life spent pursuing or clinging to wealth can destroy your health and make you financially insecure. A life spent pursuing or clinging to prestige will lead to people pleasing spineless character. A life pursuing or clinging to power will lead to immoral behavior and a corrupt soul.

The apostle Paul had become a major leader in Hebrew faith before he encountered Christ on the road to Damascus. He was raised in a devout Hebrew family who had the prestige of coming from the tribe of Benjamin, one of Jacob's favorite children. He was highly educated and held a powerful position in the synagogue system. He was the cream of the crop in the Hebrew world. Unfortunately, the synagogue system had become corrupted with worldly values and his salvation was in a perilous condition. That's when Jesus stepped in though. Jesus invited Paul to follow him, to surrender his life and everything attached to it to gain a new life with Christ.

Paul did just that. In time Paul came to realize the depth of what he gave up and what he gained. This is his testimony:

"I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own..." (Philippians 3: 8-9)

Paul gave up the life that he had with God, that had become corrupted with power, prestige, and wealth, in order to gain an incredibly close relationship with Christ. Paul "sold" all he had in order to gain the treasure that was buried in the new field he purchased.

God's absolute truth asks us to give up our lives in order to keep our lives with Christ. There is the first time we do this, but there is normally more opportunities for us to do this over the course of our lives.

Has your life and the Holy Spirit revealed to you that you are at the cusp of a new chapter of life? Is it time for you to surrender your life over to Christ once again?

It is my prayer that this message sustains and nurtures your faith in our living God. Amen.