

Solid Joy and Lasting Treasure

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Date: 18 September 2005

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[0 : 0 0] Well, do turn with me, if you would, back to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 13, page 818 in the Church Bibles. The title this morning is Solid Joy and Lasting Treasure.

Donald and Mildred Othner were hardly a remarkable couple. He was a teacher of engineering at a university in Brooklyn, and she was a former teacher who mainly did voluntary work for New York organizations.

They didn't have any children. But when they died, he in 1995 and she in 1998, it turned out they were very remarkable indeed. In their wills, all told, they left over \$340 million to several cash-strapped Brooklyn institutions.

In total, their wealth was over \$750 million. And no one who knew them had a clue that they had this money. But the couple's hometown of Omaha, Nebraska, did offer a clue.

As any stock market investor knows, that is the home of Warren Buffett, the world's greatest ever stock market investor and the world's second richest man. I think he's worth about \$40 billion, give or take a few hundred million.

[1 : 1 7] And it so happened that he was a friend of Donald and Mildred Othner. And way back in the 1960s, they'd invested \$25,000 with him. And in 1970, when he'd bought his new company, Berkshire Hathaway, they each received some shares worth \$42 each.

By the time they died, these shares were worth \$30,000 each. And now apparently they're double that. What is Warren Buffett's secret? Two words.

Value investing. That is, the ability to spot in the market undervalued companies and to buy them when no one else thinks they're worth buying. And to hold them for a very long time until their true value becomes clear to all and the cash pours in.

Here's a quote about Warren Buffett that I found this week. Buffett says he won't invest in a company unless he can see it. In other words, unless he can imagine what its balance sheet will look like in a decade or two.

A shockingly long view, especially at a time when investors hold stock for just days or even minutes at a time. Such behavior would get many contemporary fund managers fired.

[2 : 2 9] But it's hard to argue with a man whose own holdings have totally outpaced the Dow Jones Industrial Average for more than 40 years. Here's two more quotes from Warren Buffett, just in case you've been thinking about topping up your pension this week.

He says, Our goal is to find an outstanding business at a sensible price, not a mediocre business at a bargain price. And finally he says, Our favorite holding period for shares is forever.

That's Warren Buffett. They call him the Sage of Omaha, the world's greatest and most respected investor. Why? Because he is a value investor for the long term.

He buys what he can see is worth having and holding when the rest of the world is totally blind to that opportunity. And he won't buy into what he can see is of no ultimate value.

No matter whether the world is rushing to buy those things and those stocks and fighting over for them. Even when the world scorns him for missing out, as they scorned him when he totally avoided buying anything of the dot-com bubble.

- [3 : 39] But they didn't scorn him a few months later when the stock market crashed and they all lost their money. Seeing the truth that others will not see, seeing the reality about the future and acting on that in the present, despite what others will say, and holding true value for the long term.

That is the secret of the real value investor. And that says Jesus Christ is the secret of my kingdom. That's the way and the only way to solid joy and lasting treasure for all eternity.

And this whole chapter in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 13, as we've seen, is all about teaching about his kingdom, about its true nature, about its future, about its growth and its value. And about seeing that now, despite the fact that so much of it is hidden for now to so many, seeing the value.

The investment herd will not see. The investment herd won't see what's plain to those who do have eyes to see and ears to hear. But you do see.

You see the truth. In amongst the froth and the bubbles of all the flights of fancy of our world. And Jesus says to us that he speaks in parable precisely to separate out those who will listen from those who won't listen.

- [5 : 03] Those who will see and who want to see the truth and those who just won't listen because they don't really want to see the truth about the future.

And so his words in that sense are divisive. We read them in verse 12. Just look at them. For to the one who has, more will be given and he'll have an abundance. For the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

And verse 13, That's why I use parables, he says. Because, seeing they do not see. And hearing they do not hear and do not understand. They are willingly blind to the truth.

So I will not force it upon them. But my word will divide those who truly want to hear and those who don't. So if you won't listen to the truth, if you insist on blinding yourself to short-termism and folly, so be it, says Jesus.

Then you won't be able to see. But, if you will listen, as he says in verse 16 to the disciples, Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.

- [6 : 06] If you will listen, you will understand. And the truth will be made clear to you. And for those who will listen, Jesus makes clear the realities about his kingdom.

How it's begun, how it's growing here and now on earth. And the parables we've already seen have given many answers to the questions that Jesus' disciples then and today are asking about his kingdom.

If Jesus' kingdom has come, well, why don't we see what we expect to see? The disciples expected to see the day of the Lord, the great day of judgment. The day when all wrongs would be righted, when vindication would be for all the oppressed, for all the downtrodden, for the victims, for God's righteous ones.

Well, where is it? His disciples say, we don't see that. We see a world full of suffering and evil. We see a world where wickedness still seems to be flourishing.

We ask that question, don't we? Where is it? And why, if Jesus really was the Messiah, why was there such opposition? Why didn't everybody flock to him? The disciples could see that.

- [7 : 14] Just as we wonder today as believers, why is the message of Jesus rejected by so many? We ask, where is the power of God's kingdom? We don't seem to see it. Where's the impact?

It just seems to be so varied. Where's the glory of it? It seems so feeble in comparison with what Jesus is talking about. Well, Jesus has been answering these questions, hasn't he?

In the parable of the sower, in the parables of the wheat and the weeds and the fishing net, he teaches us realism to counter the false triumphalism that sometimes springs up in the church.

Yes, he says, certainly there is going to be a judgment of the righteous and the wicked. At present, that's partly hidden, of course, but one day it will be clear, but only at the very end.

Not for now. So there can't be any false triumphalism in the church. We're going to have battles. We're going to have struggles. We're going to have heartbreak right till the end. That's what Jesus says.

[8 : 11] But on the other hand, there's no false security for the world because that end will come. And that day of judgment is certain. So don't fall asleep. But on the other hand, Jesus also teaches us not to have false pessimism.

The parable of the mustard seed and the yeast that we looked at last time speaks of the real growth, the virulent growth of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ all over the world as it spreads. However feeble, however tiny, however insignificant it may seem to the eyes of the world, it is growing like the mustard seed.

It's penetrating the world like yeast. The gospel growth is inevitable. It's irrepressible. And so we're never to lose heart as Christian people today. However small the seed of the gospel may seem to be in our hands, the weapon that we fight with, however inconspicuous and feeble our own personal witness may be in our family, to our friends, the gospel has power to propagate the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The gospel has power through God's people to penetrate the world for Jesus Christ. That's what's happening. The growth of the kingdom may be presently hidden, but for those who have eyes to see, it's very real, and it's truly wonderful.

That's been Jesus' message, as we've seen in these parables. And finally now, in these last two little parables, about the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price, Jesus turns to speak not of the kingdom's hidden divisiveness, not of the judgment that will come, not of the hidden growth that will be revealed at the last, but rather to the value of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, even now.

[9 : 53] It's presently hidden, of course, to the investment herd of the world, but it is real. It is priceless. It is wonderful, nonetheless. And one day, one day when the market adjusts and Christ comes and every eye is open, one day, every eye shall see it.

But his message is, you must see it now. It can't be seen. It can't be possessed now by those who will not possess it, who will not listen.

And for those who will see the truth in the present and act on the truth and seize it, it can be possessed now, the thing of ultimate value, the thing that can be held forever, knowing that it is the true value investment that matters in this life.

And it's two very short stories that Jesus tells with that message. They've both got the same message. And we're going to look at them now. Look at verses 44 to 46. And let me give you three headings.

Just to help simplify this teaching. Jesus is teaching us three things. He's speaking about the prize of Jesus and his kingdom. He tells us about the price of finding Jesus and his kingdom.

[11 : 07] And he also gives us a promise, a firm promise, about his kingdom. So first of all, the prize. The prize of finding Jesus and his kingdom. That's really the overwhelming focus of these verses, of these little parables.

It's the message that what you have in Christ and his kingdom. Although it's undervalued and ignored and even scorned in the market forces of this world, what you have is of greater value than everything this world can offer.

It supersedes all the world's greatest treasures. That's his message. And therefore, it's not those who see that and lay hold on Christ and follow Christ.

It's not them who are fools. But those who won't see it and won't follow him. It's those ones who are desperately mistaken. That's the message. It's the one whose eyes are open to the hidden treasure, whose heart is then overcome by the sheer joy of finding Christ, finding a prize, whose joy drives him to do the one and only sane and sensible thing.

Do whatever it costs and whatever it takes to get that treasure in his hands. That's Jesus' message here. The story, of course, is familiar enough, very familiar to Jesus' hearers.

[12 : 27] In those days, there were really only two ways to have wealth and to keep it safe. Either you had to hide it in the form of treasure in a field, or you had to keep it on your person in the form of jewels.

Here's what one Victorian commentator that I came across said about this. Quote, It was difficult for a man to know what to do with his little savings. In old times, government meant oppression, and it was dangerous to seem to have any riches, and men's property must be portable or else concealed.

I think there's probably quite a few of us feel that nothing much has changed, and that the government is still after your wealth, wherever it happens to be. And, of course, there's a whole industry, isn't there, that exists to shelter wealth from government, and from Mr. Brown and his friends at the Inland Revenue.

But in those days, they didn't have clever chartered accountants to go to with tax loopholes and all that sort of thing. But the issue was just the same, just the same as today. I was reading, last week, staying with a friend, he had a magazine called Money Week, and one of the articles in the magazine was all about the debate about where we should put money at the moment.

Should it be in deposits, various kinds, bonds or accounts or whatever? Well, that's hiding your money in the ground. Or should it be in commodities like diamonds or gold? Well, that's the pearls, isn't it?

[13 : 42] Or should it be the black gold at \$60 a barrel or whatever it is? But either way, it's all about wealth and treasure. It's about things of very great value. And notice, Jesus is speaking here primarily to his disciples.

Did you notice that? Let's look back to verse 36. Then he left the crowds and came to his house and his disciples came to him. So Jesus is teaching here primarily and specifically, first of all, to his disciples.

And first of all, what he's giving them and us is a word of encouragement. It's a word of comfort for followers of Jesus who are tempted to be taken in by the valuations of the world all the time.

Especially as relating to Jesus and to his kingdom, to following him. Jesus knows that those who follow him are frail flesh and blood. He knows that. He's a realist and he's teaching us that life is hard, that there always are enemies of the gospel at work among us and that there will always be messy things in the world right till the end.

He's told us all that. And he knows also that Christians will be easily discouraged in that environment. He knows that sometimes we'll wonder whether really we've made the wise choice, whether invest in Jesus has really been the thing to do, whether following him has really been wise, when all the world around us says, you're a fool, why are you squandering your life in this religious nonsense?

[15 : 10] Don't you feel like that at some times? When you're at work, maybe, and your colleagues are scorning your faith or your love for Jesus. When they say to you, well, look, you'd be far better off pouring all your extra time and energy into earning more or into getting on in your career making progress instead of giving all that time to serving Jesus.

Why do you waste two nights a week doing something like Christianity Explore but a waste of time? Why do you waste your time on a Saturday afternoon going to that church to keep its doors open to talk to people who might come in about the gospel?

What a fool you are! Why do you give so much money to mission and evangelism? Think of all the things you could have. Don't you feel that sometimes? Maybe when you're at school or college and new students coming to university, this is a very important thing for you.

When people will scorn the commitment, the time that you might make to the Christian union or to your church, to learning the Bible, to be able to share it with others.

When you say, oh, that's more important to me than sport or the time in the union or the 101 other things that the university campus offers you.

[16 : 27] You see, the valuations of the world are very strong, they're very determined and easily, easily we can begin to believe them. We can be taken in by these things, of course. But Jesus says, no, no, no, that's all wrong.

That's all wrong. You are the ones who truly see. You are the ones who have found the real treasure. You are the ones who have discerned the real jewel that's worth everything else put together.

The world may value my kingdom as nothing, but you yourself also may be prone to doubts, but no, you are like the man who discovered a field full of treasure. You are like a man who discovered a pearl of great price and you gave everything for it and you find it.

You see, you are the ones who have seen the true valuation, not them. And you have it. It's yours. Don't doubt. Don't doubt that your joy has been misplaced.

And one day the world will see it too, so don't give up. Don't go back. See, both these men in this parable were utterly convinced that they found something of such value that absolutely nothing, nothing must get in the way of them possessing it.

[17 : 39] And that's the point Jesus is making. No doubt others didn't understand, no doubt they even scoffed. Why on earth would you squander all your life savings on buying that lumpy old rocky bit of field?

You're mad. Why give up all your business interests and all your property to just have that one pearl? It probably just looks like all the other ones to everybody else. Just like people said to Warren Buffett, why on earth are you investing billions of dollars in Coca-Cola in 1988 when its stock was at rock bottom?

But the sage of Omaha saw the future, you see. And these men saw the future, they saw the prize. They wouldn't let anything stop them possessing it.

That's the point. Like a gem dealer who looks at these stones, to you and I they just look like a bunch of stones. To a dealer, well they can see that they're uncut stones with potential, but to the expert dealer, he recognizes in amongst even that the one, the one that's worth everything else put together.

And that's what you have, says Jesus, in me and my kingdom. And you've seen it and you have it in your hand. Why? Because, as he said in verse 12, you're already following me, you're desiring me.

[18 : 58] And so your eyes have been opened to you, it has been given to see the secrets of the kingdom, to see the prize, to see the great value that others won't see. Don't distrust the joy that you've known, the experience that you've had.

He says it's real, it's a true valuation. Don't listen to the world's false valuations. They're so, so wrong. They're wildly out because they've totally misunderstood the fundamentals.

They're blind to the truth. Now friends, I suspect that maybe some of us this morning need these words of Jesus very especially. Maybe we're being bombarded day by day around us by the false valuations of the world.

Maybe we're tempted to believe them. Maybe we're beginning to doubt what we have, the prize of infinite value. Jesus says, don't doubt. Don't believe the false valuations.

Do two things. Look again at your treasure. Look at Jesus. Listen to the promise of his grace and glory. See and understand the future that you know to be true and which you possess in him.

[20 : 11] Look to Jesus. And look to those who also around you have found this treasure too. See their trust now. See their joy. See those who know what you know.

Brothers and sisters in this fellowship in the church. Do you see what they have that the world doesn't have? Do you see in their lives things that encourage you? I've been thinking a lot this week about Sandra in particular because of these Bibles.

A woman who truly loved Christ, who knew him as the pearl of great price. I can see in my mind her joy and her vivacious delight in the Lord Jesus Christ and in serving him.

I can see it in the face of other brothers and sisters who have gone to be with Christ. I can see it in so many of you. And it tells me, yes, you're right. Don't listen to the world's valuations.

See the joy of others. See the prize of Jesus and what it's done to their lives. You can't find that any other way. That prize is priceless.

[21 : 19] It's priceless. Don't give up on it. And yet, secondly, there is a price that Jesus speaks about, the price of finding Jesus and his kingdom.

Jesus makes that point too. He gives us here two different ways of finding the prize but only one way of getting it. Do you see? It costs everything, doesn't it? Do you see there? The first man in his joy goes and sells all that he has, verse 44.

The second man sees the pearl. He sold all he had to buy the pearl. In other words, you can't have this treasure without giving up all other treasures, all other investments in this life.

When compared to this are nothing and they must be thrown away. He's not saying, of course, he's not saying that you can buy this prize of Jesus and his kingdom. He's not saying you can bargain for it, you can earn it in any way, of course not.

But what he is saying is that there is still a cost. You can only receive it with empty hands. That's Jesus' point. He's saying that to receive the prize of his kingdom and of knowing him personally, you've got to reject wholesale the valuations of this world and the values of this world.

[22 : 30] not only by valuing the prize of Jesus above everything else, but also by valuing everything else, all earthly prizes as nothing, and rejecting all the rest for the one pearl, for the true treasure, for Jesus Christ himself and his kingdom.

That means turning your back on the world's way to the future and turning your face solidly to Christ's way to the future, the one way, the way of his kingdom.

And to do that costs you everything, Jesus says, costs you your life in that sense. But notice, notice, he's not speaking about that cost in terms of sacrifice.

No. That's to totally misunderstand what Jesus is offering. It's self interest in the very best sense of that word. It's all gain. These men don't lose anything in their exchange, they only gain.

They're not crushed by a burden of sacrifice and loss, not at all. Look at their joy. It's with joy that they throw everything else away in favor of the treasure and the pearl. You see, the sheer joy of knowing Christ and being found as an heir of his kingdom totally overshadows everything else.

[23 : 48] Now I know that's something that's totally baffling to an unbeliever in Jesus Christ. They just can't grasp it. It looks like sacrifice. It looks like you're giving up so much.

It looks like it's a life of constriction, of loss. But no, says Jesus, you're blind. It's all gain. It's all gain. It's the greatest bargain ever found.

In that sense, it's totally wrong to talk about the cost of discipleship. Yes, it costs everything. Yes, our whole life must be given up to Christ. But look at the return. It's everything.

It totally overshadows all the treasures of this world. It puts the world's greatest treasures in the shade, but the world can't see that.

And sometimes as Christians, we seem not to be able to see that either. I often have people saying to me personally, what a sacrifice you must have made giving up the medical profession to go into the ministry.

[24 : 51] I get that. I expect that from people who are not Christians, who don't understand. I often get it from Christian people too. I say to them, sacrifice? Are you crazy?

Are you mad? You just don't understand the sheer privilege of proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ. There's no greater treasure. There's no greater joy.

But we can at times foster in ourselves a kind of debtor mentality, can't we? Oh Lord, I'm making all these sacrifices for you. Why is my life still troubled by this or that or the next thing?

But no, never. That just means that we haven't really seen the true value, the true treasure, the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's the way the rich young ruler was.

You can read about it later on in Matthew chapter 19. Jesus said, come, give everything away and follow me. And we're told he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions. You see, he was possessed by what he had.

[25 : 57] He wasn't willing to lose all of those things to possess the far greater thing that Jesus was offering. He just hadn't grasped or seen the treasure, the pearl, the wonder of what Jesus was offering him.

But when you've really seen the prize, when you've seen that priceless value, then you know that any price that is asked of you is nothing in comparison to the sheer riches of knowing Jesus Christ and his kingdom.

Friends, do you see the confidence as believers that that must give us? We have a great treasure to proclaim, a priceless treasure. We're not to be apologetic. We're not to be feeble and hope that, oh, perhaps maybe sometimes some people might just come to faith if we plead with them enough.

No. J.C. Ryle says this, these two parables are meant to teach us that men really convinced of the importance of salvation will give up everything for Christ and eternal life.

Of course they will. Only a lunatic would do anything else. And that means that our job in the work of the gospel is not a job, it's not a work of pleading for conversions.

[27 : 12] No. It's a job of confidently proclaiming the rich treasures of the glories of Christ that supersedes everything in this world. We're the ones who've seen the truth.

We're the ones who hold out the prize. Only a madman would reject it. We focus on proclaiming him and his glory.

We proclaim the future. We proclaim a message that shouts aloud to everybody, to all the madness and blindness in the marketplace of the world's religions and the world's irreligion.

We shout a message that says from Jesus, I am the way and the truth and the life. I am the prize. And it's here and you must see it. And you must act on it.

Otherwise you're a fool. You're willfully blind. You're refusing to see what's so plain and what's been opened to you. Because when men and women see that, and when at last they do find that treasure, of course, with joy, they'll give up everything that might hinder them having it.

[28 : 23] Notice both of these men are from different backgrounds, aren't they? The laborer in the field, probably a hired man, poor, working in somebody else's field, whereas the merchant, word there is for a big businessman, no doubt he's a wealthy, wealthy man.

But the cost of finding the great prize is the same for both of them, isn't it? It's just letting go of everything. But it's a price that both of them are able to pay, isn't it?

It's not beyond the reach of either of them. The prize of the kingdom of Jesus Christ can be obtained by all, by anyone, no matter who they are or what their circumstances, anybody who's willing.

As one writer said, the only condition is to be wholeheartedly eager for it. And that brings us to the final point of the promise of finding Jesus in his kingdom. The treasure, the pearl of great price, the joy of knowing Jesus Christ, God's only Son, and finding salvation in him, it's real and it's present.

And it is being found and it will go on being found constantly and continually until Jesus Christ comes again. That's the promise we have in the gospel.

[29 : 35] However hidden the truth of the gospel may seem now to the world, however blind the world seems to be so much of the time, God has promised that there will be many, many, many countless numbers of people who will nevertheless share the joy of finding the eternal treasure now.

And friends, that means that as followers of Jesus today we can have great faith, we can have great expectation that as we go on proclaiming Christ and his kingdom, the great treasure to a world that seems blind and deaf to the truth so often, we know, we are promised that this treasure will be found again and again and again in all sorts of different ways.

Sometimes it will be like this man in the field or rather the man in the pearl auction searching out the truth, perhaps seeking it through all kinds of religions and philosophies until at last they find in Jesus Christ the one single pearl of great price that just destroys all the others and dwarfs them.

We see that in the scriptures and the gospel stories of the faithful. Remember Simeon and Anna waiting in the temple longing for the fulfillment of the promises about the coming Messiah and then they find him.

See it in Cornelius, the Roman soldier, earnestly seeking after the things of God and God sends light into his life. See it in the Ethiopian eunuch from far away country, searching in the scriptures of the people of faith for the truth and God opened his eyes.

[31 : 20] Some people all their lives have had a background around the church, around Christian people and then at last suddenly the light dawns they find the true joy of knowing Jesus Christ.

And Jesus says and promises that all who truly seek him will find him. Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Sometimes of course it's very different.

It is like the man in the field. It's a sudden surprise in the most unlikely of places and people find the truth about Jesus Christ or rather Jesus finds them. We see it here.

It happens in this church. Sometimes people don't know how or why they've come in on a Sunday or on a Wednesday but they find the treasure, the joy of Jesus Christ. There's people this morning who came to Christ just like that.

Because the Bible tells us that even if we're not seeking Christ, he is seeking and searching the lost. He's seeking out his own. And I don't know, might even be somebody here this morning with no background at all in the Christian faith.

[32 : 24] Maybe new to Glasgow, maybe new to this country. Maybe you just came in because you came to the time to do shopping. You never expected to be confronted with the person of Jesus Christ, the world's great treasure, the Savior of men, the glory of all eternity.

But you are this morning in these words. And Jesus says to you, open your eyes, see what only the willing blind will not see. See it and follow me.

And Jesus' promise is that wherever we proclaim this message of salvation of the kingdom, wherever we show Jesus and all his glory as the Savior of men and women and boys and girls, people will find that treasure.

And they'll keep on finding it. Even in the most unlikely of places. Because when we proclaim the gospel of Jesus and his kingdom in the hearing of people who don't know him and don't have it, they begin to see the treasure that they don't have.

And they begin to want it and understand that they need it and to seek it. And at the same time, we as Christians, when we understand the great treasure of God's kingdom, we see afresh what we do have.

[33 : 37] And we rejoice again in it. In the midst of all of our struggles and hardships in this life, all of that is put into perspective. As we once again see the pearl of great price, the treasure of Jesus and his kingdom, which is ours.

And that is the solid joy and the lasting treasure that nobody but the children of the kingdom can know. The apostle Paul speaks of it in his letter to the Philippians and says this of himself, Whatever gain I had, I counted as a loss for the sake of Christ.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ 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 and be found in him.

Friends, this morning, that is true value investment. It's the only investment that will never, ever disappoint. And Jesus says, Whatever it costs you, buy that.

And hold it forever. And it's the only investment that you'll ever need or want. Let's pray. We do thank you this morning, Lord, for reminding us of the glorious treasure that you've given to us in Jesus Christ and his kingdom.

[35 : 15] That we hold in our hands what the world cannot see but so desperately needs. Give us clear sight, we pray continually, that we would never be ashamed or doubt the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But help us to shine it abroad to all around, to all who will hear, so that eyes will be opened. Men and women and boys and girls will share the joy of finding in Christ all that they have ever longed for, all that they have ever needed but never found.

And to know in him the true satisfaction, the solid joy, the lasting treasure that only the children of your heavenly city know.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.