

Matthew 13:44-46  
Moved By Joy  
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Some things in life bring such joy that our spirits are lifted in their presence. But there is only one thing that that will make us feel weightless in its presence—and no I'm not talking about gravity. The message of the Gospel is such good news that joy moves us to great lengths to receive it and share it.

This morning I would like to put before us two short parables of Jesus. Parables are word pictures that convey deep meaning through simple but vivid imagery.

A bit of context before we begin, Jesus is gathered with his disciples near the Sea of Galilee and he's doing a bit of teaching. (I had the amazing privilege of swimming in the Sea of Galilee earlier this spring). Earlier in chapter 13 it says that great crowds pressed in upon him, so he got into a boat to teach them. Then in verse 34 Matthew says "all these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed he said nothing to them without a parable." Now parables are wonderful teaching tools, but they are a little like dark chocolate, they're rich and take time to savor, they need to be appreciated.

So then, to give the crowds a little time to chew, Jesus and a few of his disciples went into the house, (Peter's house) where they would ask for clarification. Hey Jesus, can you clarify that parable about weeds for us?

In explaining, Jesus reveals very deep and rich imagery of good and evil, and what would happen at the end of times when it came time for the harvest. Some would be gathered and stored and some would be bundled and burned. It was all very startling, and I can imagine the disciples looking at one another, sort of wide eyed and thinking: So when is this going to happen? And it sounds like things will get worse for us before they get better. And we're the wheat that will be gathered and stored, right Jesus?

And seeing the anxiety in their eyes, Jesus turns and tells them these two brief parables that are really at the heart of his intentions for all of us.

Jesus says in Matthew 13:44-46: **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. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.**

In these parables are two men. Each man comes across something of tremendous value, a treasure in a field and a pearl of great value. And immediately these two men are moved to do whatever it takes to obtain them.

Do you know what this is like? Have you ever been confronted with something that is so beautiful, so compelling that it made your heart skip a beat, your stomach flutter, your palms start to sweat. This is more than the feeling of getting a good deal. You don't get this when you find a deal on that

really cool jacket you've been looking for, or a new set of golf clubs, or that antique car you've had your eye on. This is much more than that.

The text says the one who finds it ***sells everything*** to obtain it. Are you thinking of something you would give everything to have? Perhaps you thinking of that first moment you laid eyes on your spouse? I am. I remember seeing Amy when she was a new student at Princeton and I was in my senior year and being seized with anticipation, and knowing in that moment that I would do anything to be with her. Maybe there was a moment when you looked at the other person and saw the treasure that they are and then were moved to great, and possibly even humiliating lengths to be with them. Do you know what I'm talking about?

And I want to ask you this: was it a sense of duty or obligation that compelled you to pursue the treasure of that other person? Of course not. Did you have to convince yourself that it was right or good to ask them out? No, and if you did, you probably aren't with that person anymore. What moved you to pursue the treasure of this other person was not obligation, but joy. The sort that causes your heart to soar, and gives you the courage to stop at nothing to obtain the treasure.

The heart of the Gospel message is one thing, joy. In fact, the Greek word confirms it. The word for joy in Greek *chara* is the same word we use to get the word Grace—and if you were wondering to yourself, is joy really at the center, there is no question that Grace is at the center of the Gospel. What moves a person to sacrifice? It's joy. Notice that Jesus doesn't say that these men sacrificed and then they got joy. No, joy came first, then came the sacrifice.

The author of Hebrews says: It was because of the joy set before him that Jesus endured the cross. Jesus looks at you and me and he not only says "you're worth it; Lindy, Tracy, Steve, you're worth it." But he looks at us as a lover who looks on their beloved and says it is my joy to give it all up for you. He doesn't say, well this sacrifice is noble and has intrinsic value in its virtue and after I do it I'll have love for these people. No, joy drives sacrifice.

Commentator Dale Bruner says this: It is not by telling people to sacrifice that they make "sacrifices," it is first by telling people of God's treasures that people sell what is necessary for the costly but joyous acquisition. To put this in theological terms, you and I are not compelled to give our lives to God because we have the requirements for peace and contentment presented to us in the law. But rather we are invited to peer into the depths of our own hopelessness and depravity, and there be met by the Savior who says here let me take that, I'm giving it all for you. This is the message, this is the hope, this is the promise that's worth selling everything to obtain.

Do you understand this? It's the central message of the Gospel, grace comes first, knowing that you are chosen, loved, forgiven, comes first, then because of the joy you have, you forsake everything else to receive it.

The second thing about joy is the way in which it often catches us off guard. Joy catches us by surprise and envelops us in its embrace, and captivates us by its beauty. When the disciples came to the tomb on Easter morning expecting to find Jesus still buried there they were surprised at the joyful news that he was not there but had risen. When Jesus met the disciples on the Road to Emmaus they were surprised and overjoyed when they realized it was him. Saul of Tarsus, the great persecutor of the Church was surprised when Jesus came to him on the Road to Damascus.

In fact this idea of Surprise Joy is the title CS Lewis gives to his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*. And since his friend Tolkien was a Philologist it was a play on words, it could be also called *Surprised by the Surprise*.

I was reading the news a few weeks back when I came across a story of a man in Arizona who found something surprising. After asking a neighbor to help him clean out his garage they came across a Lakers poster he thought might be worth a few hundred dollars. So he called a sports memorabilia collector to come have it appraised. But when they went to the garage they stumbled across something interesting. A number of modern paintings were there including one that featured an amalgamation of splatters and swirls similar to the style of Jackson Pollack.

And after a long investigation that included this dealer piecing together the story of how such a piece could end up in a Scottsdale garage, they finally tracked it back to the man's sister, the black sheep of the family who happened to be a Manhattan socialite and acquaintance of the artist Pollack. Then he went to have it authenticated where it was discovered that yes, they had stumbled across one of his late and missing pieces.

When he heard this, the dealer, Josh Levine, I felt weightless, I thought I was actually having a panic attack.

He arrived that day with the thought of acquiring Lakers poster that he could sell for a few hundred dollars, but what he discovered was something that could have been worth 50,000 times that.

When you encounter the message of Jesus don't let your meager aspirations get in the way. If our approach to faith is only that if we give a little we will get a little, you will never have eyes to see the precious treasure the pearl of inestimable value that is available to you. If you're not willing to be surprised you'll never be pushed beyond your comfort zone. The Gospel does this, if you come anticipating little, you will receive little. But if you come willing to be surprised, two things will happen: 1. You will see that you're not just a person who has some needs, but that you are a sinner, incapable of any good thing on your own. 2. You will discover the pearl of great value, the news that you are more loved, forgiven, and cherished than you could ever imagine.

This is the surprise that can make us feel weightless.

And lastly, and this is critical to our understanding of these parables, and it's this. While it is joy that enables the selling of everything to obtain the treasure, it's only when we actually do it that we obtain the treasure. Good intentions are not enough here folks. In Matthew's Gospel, selling everything he had to obtain these treasures is the condition—not for finding, but for having the treasure.

In order to obtain the joy, the peace, the hope of your salvation, you've got to let go of your small treasures, your small aspirations, your small dreams, and be willing to risk them to receive God's big dream for your life, that is joy, abundance, redemption in him.

Back to the story of the painting for a bit. Once the man had the painting he still couldn't cash in on the value. You see it had spent most of its life living in smokey rooms or musty garages and had weathered very poorly. In order for it to be restored to its original quality where it could be sold at auction the finder needed to invest about \$50,000 to restore it. A tremendous amount of money,

yeah? But if he was willing to do so, the painting was estimated to sell for between 10-15 million dollars.

What do you need to let go of in order to receive the infinitely valuable treasure of knowing Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Is it your career ambitions, is it your desire for comfort in your retirement. The treasure of knowing Christ is in allowing him to direct your life, to guide you to the places where you can be used. Perhaps it's sacrificing an hour each week to take on a Kid's Hope Mentee. Perhaps it's spending time at the Access, perhaps it's choosing to instead of spend your time and resources on yourself to give a larger portion to the Church or to some group or ministry that needs it.

Again, let me remind you, doing this doesn't earn your salvation—that's already won, it's yours. But the more we relinquish control over our lives, and the more we live in faith, storehouse upon storehouse of blessings, blessings of peace, of contentment, of ever increasing joy are released into your life.

So let's allow our lives to be moved by the joy of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.