

Mornin City Church! How we doing? My name's Jake Blair. This is my first time teaching here in this building. I taught a couple times at Jackson Terminal, anyone here remember those days?

Anyway...glad to be with you. I feel like its kinda routine whenever you have a guest teacher that you have to show a picture of your family. So boom. [rant for a bit]

Last thing...at Midtown where I teach, our folks tend to be pretty responsive so I'd love it if you helped me feel like I was at home and be a bit responsive while I teach. Can we do that?

If you have a Bible we're gonna be in **Matthew 13:44-46**. This is a shorter teaching of Jesus but something that honestly has all sorts of practical ramifications. And to catch you up to speed, Jesus is teaching his disciples all about what's known as "the kingdom of heaven." If you had to summarize what was Jesus' life and ministry all about, I think it's this, this is his whole project - the kingdom of heaven. In one of Jesus' first public appearances in Matthew 4 he says, "Repent and believe because the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." When he heals the sick and the lame and the blind - he's giving people a preview of what the kingdom of heaven looks like. When he dies for sin and conquers death, it's so that you and I could experience the kingdom of heaven. And this passage today, we're in the middle of Jesus telling His disciples what the kingdom of heaven is like through a bunch of parables back to back to back. This idea is so massive, and so crucial to Jesus that one analogy, one illustration just doesn't cut it.

I heard it described once as this: God's people living under God's rule, experiencing God's blessing.

Not just going to be with Jesus when I die but how might we be with Jesus before I die. How can I experience Heaven in the here and now? How can I know a life pouring over with love, joy and peace right now? How can I live a life of blessing and happiness being with Jesus and becoming like Him in my life no matter what I am going through?

And this Kingdom vision Jesus wants for us, is honestly something that deep down within us we all really want. So if you're here this morning and you don't yet identify as a follower of Jesus - then we're glad you're here and hear me when I say: Jesus wants for you to experience His Kingdom more than anything else.

Now it's one thing to define it, but it's another thing to show it. And that's what Jesus is doing here by giving us these parables. So let's read:

Matthew 13:44-46

44 "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.

45 "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.

Like I said, this passage is sandwiched in a collection of what's known as parables. Just one after the other. Bam. Bam. Bam. And these parables are literary devices often employed by Jesus to either obscure or reveal truth depending on his audience. And when it comes to parables, generally speaking, there's one big idea behind it - and then there's usually a strange detail we're supposed to notice in there two.

So what's the big idea? And these two parables essentially get across the same idea. In fact, the Greek if you were to hold these two stories up side-by-side are pretty similar. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is

like a person who discovers something so incredibly valuable that out of a response for this discovery, they buy it.

Mark Bailey

Like the treasure, the kingdom is the source of highest joy, and, as seen in the pearl, the kingdom should be deemed as the most precious possession

I love that. "The highest source of joy." Jesus says this is what the kingdom of heaven is like.

You're most prized possession that you'll do anything to get it and to get more of it. Once you know just how much the God of the Universe loves you and likes you. Once you know how much He's given to bring you into His Kingdom, to experience His love and His peace and His joy for your life, the worthy response to that valuable discovery is to do everything you can to experience this more and more in your life.

So what's the strange detail? I think it's this: its that it's hidden. The treasure, the pearl, they get discovered by someone. Someone sees the value of it in a way no one else hadn't before.

which - idk how that hits you. but for me, hearing about people finding treasure doesn't really connect with me.

Perhaps a more modern parable might be something like this. Right now my friends are suddenly really into stocks. Which I guess is what you do in your early to mid 30s? No one really told me, it just kinda happened. And there are two friends of mine I want to contrast.

So I've got one friend who recently stumbled upon this stock that was priced low but thought it was gonna take off and get him a lot of money. He walks into the room and tells us, "I've found the next big thing: shrimp." Apparently, there was some new tech created to catch and clean shrimp that would apparently revolutionize the industry or whatever. Well cut to a couple weeks later, and that stock tanked. He's not so big on the shrimp anymore.

I've got another friend who's great great great grandparents, invested into a stock when it was a young up and comer too. That stock's name was Coca Cola. Don't know if you've heard of that one...but they're doing ok for themselves.

Now for me I do not care for stocks whatsoever. It feels like gambling and that just freaks me out. However, if you knew beyond certainty that your stock was the next Coca Cola - I would imagine you'd dump out as much as you possibly could because you knew this: **the more you invest, the more you'll get back.**

Jesus is saying this is what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. **The more you give up, the more you get back.** Whatever you pour into the Kingdom of Heaven, you're going to get that back and more. To where **it's not really a sacrifice** in the grand scheme of things. You're just delaying some gratification now so you can reap all the blessings later down the road.

This is what Jesus says about church family in Matthew 19 - spoiler alert if you haven't read all of Matthew yet...

Matthew 19:29

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

Or elsewhere Jesus talks about this when it comes to our entire lives - again spoiler alert

Matthew 16:25

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it

This is how the early church understood Jesus' teaching as well. In **Acts 2**, the first church gave their lives away - possessions and all - to one another so that peoples' needs would be met. So that church leaders would be financially supported. So more people could get welcomed into the family of God - even at the expense of losing their lives. In a time when the church was under immense persecution - Christians still gave away everything for the kingdom. Why? Because they realized the Kingdom of Heaven was bigger than them and bigger than their stuff, so they gave it all away in order to reap the full benefits of this sort of Kingdom life.

Jesus is saying in my kingdom things are different. It's not what you expect. It's hidden in plain sight and you the world ignores it.

- The kingdom of the world says the powerful are who's in charge. But in the kingdom of heaven Jesus says the meek inherit the earth
- The kingdom of the world says build up your resume, look good in front of others. But the kingdom of heaven says to lower yourself, to confess your sin - because who cares what others think of you - the God of the Universe loves you
- The kingdom of the world says work, be productive, climb the ladder of success, but the the kingdom of heaven says rest, you're not defined by what your output, be a servant to others

And herein this parable Jesus is challenging our version of kingdom when it comes to our stuff:

The kingdom of the world says accumulate for yourself to make your life better, but the kingdom of heaven says **the good life is found when you give it all away.**

Just hearing that may make you a little nervous, I think that's kinda the point. Now let me just say on this two quick disclaimers

1 - There's one view that's popular among folks our age called the **poverty gospel**, that says to really follow Jesus you need to literally give up everything. No bank account. No roof over your head. Sell it all. Be penniless like Jesus was. The less you have, the more God loves you. A couple problems with this

- For one, the passage is saying the opposite. It's not give it all away so that God can love you, but rather, once you know the God of the Universe loves you, your response is to want to give it all away.
- Second, this is not how we see the church in the New Testament handle their stuff. Jesus is not anti-stuff or not anti-money. But he is anti-anything that gets in the way of you experiencing life in the Kingdom now. So rather than having a close-handed posture about your stuff, or your money, or your time, Jesus wants to free you from that, to have an open-hand to say, "Jesus, what's mine is really yours. So how can I use this to invest in the things of God? The people of God? The mission of God?"

2 - There's another view that's popular called the **prosperity gospel**. This idea that the more you financially give away, the more you financially actually get back. So if you want the life you always dreamed about - good health, a good career, a good marriage, then give it all away and reap back the material blessings. This also misses the point because in this view the end goal is more stuff - which

doesn't line up with how we see followers of Jesus in the New Testament either. They often gave everything away, and were treated with persecution and often death.

So we use our time and our money to invest in a greater blessing but not in the physical sense. Rather, in the Scriptures blessing often means a deeper intimacy with King Jesus, experiencing to a greater degree His love in your life, a grounded sense of peace, a soul-level sense of contentment knowing that nothing can ever happen in this life that will separate you from the rule and reign of Jesus in your life.

- You want family? Jesus says give up your view of family and get back the family of God that will last forever
- You want love? Jesus says give up what you love for His sake and get back the love of God which will never let you down

The Kingdom of Heaven not simply as this future abstract idea down the road that was gonna happen to them after they die, but as something you can usher into your life, your LifeGroup, in your community right now. That the more open-handed you are with your life, in every category, the more the Spirit can work in you and through to experience all Jesus wants for you. And yes, there was this future vision they had in mind that everything they did on this planet, even after all their stuff was gone, when their health failed, when all was stripped away - they looked to King Jesus who would one day reward them for everything they ever did and they would experience His Kingdom once and for all, free from sin and pain and death forever and ever.

The more we give away the more we get back.

The problem is while we might know this on a theological level - practically we live for things that won't last. Jesus essentially says earlier in Matthew, show me your bank account and I'll show you what you think really matters most in life. Or, if you really wanna know what you're living for right now, show me your calendar - how do you spend your time? Or what would you say is your primary love - the main thing you're chasing after?

Because anything you're loving, or spending or chasing after outside of Jesus and His Kingdom no matter how good it is will not last. It will never give you what you really want in this life. So what's keeping you from experiencing more of the Kingdom in your life? If you had to say, "Jesus take everything but not that," what would it be? We've all got something.

For me, I think about my family and my job. I love my wife, she loves Jesus and it's awesome. I've got three kids and they're not Christians yet but man, they're surrounded by the best church family I could ask for. When it comes to my job - I think I have a dream job I really do. And. There's this part of me that says, "Jesus take everything but don't take that. I'd much rather build my own kingdom out of these things than let your kingdom call the shots."

The problem is, when I place all my value and all my hopes and dreams into those things, I'm going to get let down. My wife and kids and job will never ultimately fulfill me. As great as it all may be, if I'm so close-handed with these things that I don't allow Jesus to dictate how I ought to leverage those things for His Kingdom - then I actually miss out on all the Kingdom blessing that Jesus is offering me.

In another one of the Gospels, Jesus has another parable called the Parable of the Rich Fool, who basically just builds up his own little kingdom. Who doesn't think about the things of God, he only cares about this life. Jesus says that person is a fool. **Biblical smack talk.**

That word “fool” in Hebrew is the word **hevel** and that same word hevel can also be translated as empty, as vapor, or nothingness. To be a fool is to spend your life chasing after things that amount to nothing. But you chase it like a vapor. Always just out of reach. Never giving you the satisfaction you ultimately crave for.

We’ve even got a psychological term for this called the sunk cost fallacy. Anyone hear about this? It used to have to do primarily with business decisions. People would pour all their money into something, and it doesn’t turn a profit, so you keep pouring money into it because you think “its just a matter of time before it pans out.” So people keep spending more and more money to some end that never pans out because they’re too invested. They’ve bought into this false reality that thinks, “If I just try a little bit more” “If I do this or that, then I’ll get what I want, and then it will be enough. And then I will be enough.”

One psychologist puts it like this:

Christopher Olivola, Psychological Science

The sunk cost effect is the general tendency for people to continue an endeavor, or continue consuming or pursuing an option, if they’ve invested time or money or some resource in it... That effect becomes a fallacy if it’s pushing you to do things that are making you unhappy or worse off... All of these things are irrational, in the sense that you should realize the money is gone... But I do think people do these things because they want to convince themselves that they’ve managed to recapture the loss.

The truth is, I think some of us in this room, when looking at your time and your money and your energy, might actually be living in this **sunk cost mindset**. Like the parable of the rich fool. Building your life on something that won’t last.

- Maybe you have a sunk cost mindset when it comes to relationships - “I’ve invested so much in this relationship it has to work out, I’ll do whatever it takes” And maybe giving it away to the kingdom looks like breaking up with whoever it is and asking Jesus’ to comfort you with His presence and His love
- Maybe you have a sunk cost mindset when it comes to relationships - “This job is hard” Or “I deserve more respect, better pay” And maybe giving it away to the kingdom looks like learning to be content where God has you, knowing He’s using that job to shape you to look more like Him.

Whatever it is for you, Jesus is calling us to say, “Let go. Give it up. Loosen your grip so you can catch hold of what I want to give you. Give it up the chase for your own kingdom so you can get what I’m trying to give you.”

Because the kingdom of heaven is a place where you and I belong, and the good news is we don’t have to strive for it. We don’t need to buy our way into it. The kingdom of heaven has been freely given to us. That while we we’re building our own little kingdoms, Jesus died for all our sin, all our pursuits, all our foolish chasings, and He offers us the kingdom as a blood-bought gift.

So now the call is for you and for me, to give it all way. Give up your striving, give up your chasing, and pursue the one who made you, the one who loves you, the one who offers you the kingdom of heaven.

There is joy in store for us when we realize what’s being made available to us here.

So to wrap up our time this morning, let me suggest a couple really practical ways to go about this:

1 - Consider your habits

Our hearts are connected to our habits. And if you want to change your heart to line up with the things of Jesus' kingdom, the best way to go about it is to change your habits. The idea of giving may not bring you "cheer" or joy or whatever, but when you discipline yourself in the way of Jesus, and orient your stuff toward His Kingdom, that discipline eventually turns into a habit and that habit begins to reorient your heart in ways you didn't think was possible.

So look at your calendar and see where your time goes. Look at your budget and see where your money goes.

If you're in a LifeGroup, have them speak into it as well. If they love Jesus and they love you, then have them help you how to best figure out how you can invest more and more into His Kingdom with what you have.

If that sounds scary - yeah, it is. But there's so much more beauty and blessing on the other side of it. And as you're reviewing your calendar and budget - ask yourself, honestly, Where is my time and money going? What alternative Kingdom am I actually investing in? Am I investing in my comfort? My hobbies? Am I investing in my entertainment? Honestly ask yourself that and use that as an opportunity to bring it before King Jesus to have him loosen your grip on those things.

2 - Consider how to give it away

I know this doesn't sound the sexiest, but here's the thing: we prioritize the things we consider the most important. We plan for it. If there's something that we consider valuable and worth our time, we will reschedule and cancel whatever plans we had before in order to prioritize whatever's gonna be the most beneficial for me.

When it comes to your time - are you planning and prioritizing the things of God's Kingdom and His people and His mission? Building LifeGroup night into your schedule, building missional rhythms in there? Are you planning and prioritizing spending time in God's Word daily? To meditate on His love for you and His grace for you?

For me, I've got three very tiny children and my wife and I share a digital calendar on our phones and we're at the point in our lives where everything we do, from spending time with Jesus, to spending time with LifeGroup, to spending time with each other - it's all mapped out on there.

- And there's this myth that the older you get the more time and freedom you'll have. Which, if I could go back in time and slap myself for believing that I totally would. The older you get, the less time you have, the more you have to plan and prioritize what you really want your life to be about. And I know there's a lot of young singles here, man, what an opportunity you have right now to set the trajectory for what you want your life to become. You can begin setting up your life in such a way that it's all bent towards all things King Jesus and His Kingdom.
- There's this other myth out there that says if your schedules all booked up, isn't that restrictive? What happens if something else pops up I want to do instead? To which I would say, scheduling and planning is not restrictive if you know what you're living for.

When it comes to your money - if you wanna prioritize the things of God's Kingdom, to give it all away, plan it out. Don't wait for spontaneity - because chances are it won't happen. Rather, create a budget to give your money away. Consistently. If you're not already giving a percentage of what you make to City

Church, that's a great place to start - and no, they didn't tell me to say that. Perhaps create a hospitality budget, maybe start by putting aside a little bit each month to buy a meal for someone, or throw a party, or meet a need. Again - it probably won't happen spontaneously but if you plan for it, you build it into your way of life. And slowly over time, it gets to be more and more fun and you see God show up in it and through it.

Some stories I've heard about y'all just in the last couple of weeks:

- In one LifeGroup someone car broke down and the LG rallied together in just a few hours and Venmo'd him the money to get it taken care of
- Or another LifeGroup who's ongoingly been paying for each other's counseling fees, and bills, and groceries
- Or how y'all have partnered with other churches to provide Christmas presents for foster kids, and y'all gave more money per capita than the other churches

I know for most of y'all that seems normal. But man, I hope you see that that's actually a work of the Spirit moving in your hearts. And what more is in store for you and for this church family of yours when we learn to continue just giving it all away as you see God's Kingdom break through and Knoxville looks a little bit more like Heaven each day because of your generosity?

3 - Consider Jesus who gave it all away for us

Perhaps the biggest spoiler alert in the whole gospel of Matthew - is that Jesus models for us what it looks like to give everything away for the Kingdom. He invests His body and His blood, He gives away His sweat and His tears, He gives up His very life for the Kingdom so that you can be a part of this. That you sin, your self-interest keep you from this and yet Jesus through the cross and the empty tomb makes a way for you to get this kingdom life into you. You are now an heir to the king no matter what. You're a child of the kingdom and nothing can take that away. And in the meantime, our call as children of the kingdom is to get more of Jesus' kingdom life into us.

- So let's give it all away, following the pattern of King Jesus
- Let's give our time away, knowing that in Jesus there's no such thing as lost time because we're gonna spend forever with Him one day
- Let's give away our stuff, knowing we can't take it with us and we will receive so so much more in the life to come the more we let go of everything we have here

The more we give to the kingdom, the more we look like our King.

Pray