

A Gospel People

THE HIDDEN TREASURE

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” (Jim Elliot) How do you respond to a statement like that? Some of us think it’s great don’t we?! We think... yes – spot on!! Some of us think – sounds good ... but where’s the catch? Some of us allow ourselves to think about such a statement. If I agree with that kind of statement – what would it actually mean for me? What would it cost you to give what you cannot keep to gain what you cannot lose? Well.... it would cost you everything you cannot keep. Which is everything. “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” What is it that you cannot lose?

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8 v 38 & 39)

“He is no fool who give what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” Jim Elliot gave his life for the gospel – killed by the tribe he was trying to reach with the gospel. So how do you respond to what he said?

We can make a mistake when we think of Jim Elliot. We can think only about his sacrifice – which we much say was immense. But we can, if we are not careful, overlook the fact that he had a passion for personal gain. He wanted profit for sure, but what separated him from most Christians, and what maybe separates him from us, is not that he didn’t want treasure.... but that he wanted real treasure. He was not satisfied with treasure that would be lost, he wanted only treasure that would last! There’s nothing wrong with pursuing treasure, but it is

important to pursue treasure that will last. Wealth is worth seeking – true wealth is worth seeking.

“The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.” (Mathew 13 v 44)

It is probably true to say that this man was, like all of us, quite attached to his possessions. Yet when he saw the value of the treasure in the field, he sold everything he had. Did the sacrifice cause him pain? Did he have regrets? NO – absolutely not! It is a matter of relative value. Until he found the treasure, his possessions seemed valuable, but compared to the dazzling beauty and incalculable value of what he discovered, everything he owned and treasured to that point seemed worthless. John White said about this man: “Anyone but a fool would do exactly as the man did.” What kind of person are you? John Wesley said: “I value all things only by the price they shall gain in eternity.” David Livingstone said: “I place no value on anything I possess, except in relation to the Kingdom of God.”

How about you... what kind of a person are you? If you're like me, the way you have always understood this parable is that it is really about material possessions. That is of course true, and it challenges me to the core about what I have. But is that all it means? I'm not so sure. Keith Tondeur commenting on this passage presents another challenge – a much broader one! He notes that the man in this parable who finds the treasure was doing what he would have done as part of his daily routine. He didn't find the treasure by chance, he didn't find it by doing something extraordinary, actually he was going about his daily business. The truth here is that the treasure of the kingdom of God is found in the ordinary. And there's another challenge. Since treasure of great value would be buried, not just lying on the surface, he must have been doing his job diligently. Friends, the Kingdom of God is with us everywhere and everyday. Where do you see it? What are you seeing in the places you go? That's what a good testimony is – seeing the Kingdom of God – the extraordinary in the ordinary!

Sometimes people see a little tension in this parable: the man hides the treasure until he can go back and buy the field. Friends – don't miss the point! If someone is that committed to gaining something that, in truth, will not last, what would it look like if Christians were as committed to following Christ? How about you? The point being made in this parable is that the Kingdom of God is worth everything. One commentary said that these who find this real treasure: "joyfully make it their one priority in life." They seek first the Kingdom, sacrificing all to it, but at the same time finding with the Kingdom all they need! So... what would it look like if we were as committed to following Christ as the man in this parable was to buying a field. Here, maybe, are some answers.

"Vincent was steeped in witchcraft. He had made a pact with Satan, and for twenty years hadn't been able to wear clothing, as it felt like pins were pricking him when it contacted his skin. He hadn't cut his hair in that time either, and looked completely deranged. The whole area around Bubanza submitted to his spiritual leadership and lived in fear of him. He refused to listen to the team's first attempt to tell him about Jesus, but they persisted and returned. He was delivered, and when he burned all his charms, the community was so astonished that on the spot twenty other people gave their lives to Christ." (taken from the Great Lakes Outreach newsletter sent via email on 4th August 2009.)

I've told you before about Nelson from Wum, Cameroon. Here's a young man, who desperately wants a wife, who has a passion to see the word of God in his mother tongue. His sacrifice is real he has:-

- Given up a University Masters
- Given up getting out of where he is

He has decided to stay where he is and not further himself (although he is immensely talented) and see it through to the end..... Because the word of God is real treasure and he wants others to hear it.

I've told you before about Alfred, Alfred who's given up his livelihood as a forester to lead the translation project in Wum. Alfred whose family – or some of them are against what he's doing because they don't understand God's call on his

life. Alfred who still has to work as a farmer when he can, to grow food to support his family... but he has found real treasure!

I spoke with another minister this week – he’s moving – taking a large pay cut to go and work with two small churches. The churches can’t afford much, so the normal salary expectations, and what churches are normally expected to cover don’t apply. There’s no pension scheme either where he’s going, but he’s committed to following Christ so he’s going! What about you?

If we are committed to following Christ and to making the Kingdom of God our No.1 priority, then wouldn’t we be living the values we say we hold in this place? We will be motivated by God’s free gift of love... if we have truly found the treasure of God’s love... don’t we pursue it for the sake of others? To love them and not to judge them, how many relationships would be transformed if love flowed – at home, at work, in church? How much do we really care? How truthful are we – or do we hide behind veils? How much are we “and then some” people?

I heard a story this week in an office: There was a piece of equipment broken in an office. No-one wanted to take responsibility for this piece of equipment for fixing it or replacing it. This went on for some time until some people decided – very quietly – they would replace it. Once done, no-one knew who had replaced it, some did not even notice it had been replaced, but it was done because of an “and then some” attitude of a Christian in the workplace.

How much do we take the time to stop and give time to people because we have real treasure? How much do we really use what God has given us for his Kingdom, rather than for our own gain? You are a piece of the jigsaw – but are you in truth a mission piece? Will you go only if there is a good road? Or are you prepared to go where there seems to be no road at all? Friends, we have discovered the treasure of the Kingdom of God. As we diligently go about our everyday business these values should be what people see, and if they are not evident, it begs the question whether we have found any real treasure at all. Because if we have, we would consider everything else worthless in the light of its eternal value.

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”
Amen.

Preached at Crawley Baptist Church by Rev. Ian Phillips on Sunday 9th August 2009