

Why We're Here: Understanding our Mission

Loving God as our Treasure (Matthew 13:44-46)

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on January 11, 2015

Introduction

- ❖ Every organization is founded on a mission, a purpose, a reason for its existence. Why does this organization exist? Why is it here? What is it trying to accomplish? That's its mission. And most organizations typically try to encapsulate that mission in a singular statement. Something catchy. Something memorable. Something called a mission statement.
 - ▶ Now the good mission statements are the ones that remain generally abstract and describe something that you don't expect to necessarily achieve but something you want to constantly pursue. If your mission statement is too specific or too easily achievable, then you're probably not thinking big enough.

- ❖ So for example, in 1980, Steve Jobs founded **Apple** with this mission in mind: "To make a contribution to the world by making tools for the mind that advance humankind." I think we'd all agree that his company has been on point in pursuing that mission. His products have definitely "advanced humankind" (our collective experience) and continue to do so.
 - ▶ **Google's** mission statement goes like this: "To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." Even with its massive reach and multitude of products, the company managed to boil their mission down to this. Simple!
 - One more. According to the **MD Anderson**, their mission is to eliminate cancer in Texas, in the nation, and the world. Or another way to put it: Make cancer history. That's awesome. Such a clear, inspiring mission. Regardless if they achieve it within our lifetime or the next century, that is still a worthy mission to pursue.

- ❖ *So what about us? What's the mission statement of our organization, of our church? Why do we exist? Why are we here?* Well if you've been around us any amount of time, you've probably heard one of us say that **Houston Chinese Church exists to make God-loving and compassionate disciples of Jesus Christ among all nations.** That's why we're here.

- ❖ We base that statement off two verses found in the Gospel of Matthew. The first is called the **Great Commission** in Matthew 28:19-20. That's where Jesus charges his disciples to go and make more disciples among all nations, among all peoples of the earth. The Great Commission tells us what to do and where to do it. Make disciples among all nations.
 - ▶ Then we read that along with the **Great Commandment** in Matthew 22:37-39, which tells us what kind of disciples we're to make. A lawyer asks Jesus, "What's the greatest commandment in the law?" And he says the great and first commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. In other words, you shall be a lover of God (God-loving) and a lover of others (compassionate).

- ❖ This is what we're about. We're committed to making God-loving, compassionate disciples of Christ among all nations – starting here in our city, here among us, and among all those whom God has placed in your life by his sovereign design. Friends, family, colleagues, classmates, actual neighbors, anyone God brings along your path.

- ❖ **To start the new year, we want to begin with a sermon series that helps reset and recenter us around our organizational mission.** For the next three weeks, we'll be unpacking our mission statement. Today we'll be looking at what it means to be a God-loving disciple. Next week is about being compassionate disciples. After that, we'll consider our Lord's strategy to make disciple-making disciples. And that'll lead us into the February, which we've designated as Missions month. The whole month will be dedicated to promoting global missions, which is essentially what we mean by making disciples "among all nations".
- ❖ This morning I chose a well known passage. It's only three verses long and contains two short and similar parables. And in them the kingdom of heaven is being compared to a hidden treasure and a pearl of great price.
 - ▶ I want to show you three things from our text. 1) The **superior value** of the kingdom. 2) The **substantial cost** of the kingdom. 3) The **satisfying joy** of the kingdom.

The Superior Value

- ❖ Let's begin by considering the superior value of the kingdom of heaven. It's so valuable, so precious, that Jesus is comparing it to treasure. Now before we get into it, you might be wondering if these parables are even relevant to our discussion since they're all about the kingdom of heaven. Do you love it like treasure? But we're talking about God and loving God as our treasure. So do these parable even apply?
 - ▶ Yes, they do. The term *kingdom of heaven* is unique to Matthew's Gospel. The other ones use the more common phrase *kingdom of God*. But they're referring to the same thing. Most people think Matthew preferred to use *kingdom of heaven* because he was writing for a predominantly Jewish audience that would have avoided the direct use of God's name for fear of taking it in vain.
- ❖ So when you hear *kingdom of heaven*, don't just picture some future destination waiting for you after you die. That's what the word *heaven* usually conjures up. But Jesus is talking about the kingdom of God that's been breaking into our world since the day he was born into it. **So receiving or entering this kingdom is not something that happens in the future after you die. It's something that happens in the present when you're converted.** When you become a Christian, a disciple of Christ.
 - ▶ So here's another way to say it. Instead of kingdom of heaven or God, think *reign of God*. Being under God's kingly rule. So in v44, imagine Jesus saying, "Being under God's reign, having him as *your* King ... is like finding treasure hidden in a field."
- ❖ That's essentially what Jesus is trying to say. **Being in God's kingdom, having him as your God, your King – is like finding treasure, like striking it rich.** Having God in your life is like finally getting that pearl of your dreams. The one you've been searching for all your life.
 - ▶ And apparently God is of such superior value that – even if receiving him as King cost you everything you hold dear – a God-loving disciple would make that exchange *in joy*. You would sell it all and consider it a happy trade-off.

- ❖ We this attitude in both men in both parables. The man in the first parable was likely a laborer working for a landowner. Now in those days, there were no modern banks with secure saving accounts. So the safest place to store your money and valuables was underground. You dug a hole and marked it with an X. Remember the Parable of the Talents? Where does the servant who fails to invest his talent put it? In the ground (Mt 25:25).
 - ▶ So back in our parable, we have this man probably ploughing a field when his plough strikes a treasure chest that had been buried long ago. And after making this life-changing discovery, he covers it back up and then, *“in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”*

- ❖ Now in v45, the parable is about a merchant. *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls.”* Pearls were regarded in ancient society as one of the most valuable of gems. Ancient documents tell of record size pearls worth tens of millions of dollars in today’s currency. In Revelation, John sees a vision of the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem, which are made of pearl (21:21). Pearls were a big deal in those days.
 - ▶ So in v46, when this merchant finds *“one pearl of great value”* that surpasses all the fine pearls in his collection, he liquidates everything he has to buy it.

- ❖ Now there is obviously similarity between the two parables. But notice a subtle difference. In the first, the kingdom is a hidden treasure that one just so happens to stumble across. But in the second, the treasure was something diligently sought after.
 - ▶ I think Jesus makes this distinction because he’s saying: **No matter how you came by God’s kingdom – by unexpected surprise or by diligent searching – the question is: *How valuable is it in your eyes?***

- ❖ Some of you have been seeking God for a while now. You’ve been coming to church, reading the Bible, asking questions. You’ve been searching hard. But then some of you are different. You’ve never wrestled with the big questions in life. You’ve never taken religion too seriously. But now for some reason you’re here in church listening to a sermon! It doesn’t matter how you ended up here. What matters is answering this question: *How valuable is God to you? Will you enter his kingdom and follow him as King even if it costs everything?*

- ❖ If you tell God, “I’ll enter your kingdom *if...* I’ll follow you *so long as...*” whatever you use to finish that sentence is something you value more than God – something you won’t give up to follow him. That *something* is what you really love.
 - ▶ You can give lip service to God all day long. But in the end you have to ask: What is that one thing you won’t give up? **Whatever it is – that one thing you have to have, that you won’t surrender for anything – that is your true love.** That’s the true treasure of your life.
 - But of course the point of this passage is that, for a Christian, the one thing you won’t give up *is* God. God is the true treasure of your life. Your greatest love.

- ❖ **Now I'm not suggesting that a Christian perfectly values God.** That a Christian never struggles with this. I'll be the first to admit that my affections for Jesus are often weak and my desires are often conflicted.
 - ▶ But when I read the Psalmist cry out from the recesses of his heart, "*Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*" (Ps. 73:25-26) – that doesn't sound strange or fanatical to me. That sounds beautiful. That's the beat of my heart. That's how I want to feel all the time.
- ❖ **Jesus' point is that his disciples are those who deep down love God as their true treasure.** This is so crucial because otherwise you'll find yourself standing at the entrance of the kingdom hesitating to go in because it's too costly in your eyes. It asks for too much.

The Substantial Cost

- ❖ Let's be honest, there is a substantial cost involved when it comes to the kingdom. It's what we call **the cost of discipleship** – the cost of entering the kingdom and following its King. This cost is implied in our parables. The man has to sell all he has to buy that field. The merchant has to sell all he has to buy that pearl.
- ❖ But we have to be careful here. Don't get the wrong impression. **The act of selling all you have to purchase a greater treasure should not be interpreted to mean that the kingdom is something you can buy.** You can't purchase a relationship with God.
 - ▶ That's the message of the Gospel. Salvation is a free gift of God that can't be bought with your money or merit. It doesn't matter how much you give in terms of service or devotion to God or to his church. Salvation is not for sale. It's totally free.
- ❖ But I know what some of you are thinking, "Wait, if God is so valuable, then how can salvation (getting God!) be so free?" Because in my own experience, I know if you give me something for free, that thing probably wasn't worth much in the first place. It's not valuable.
 - ▶ **But the thing is, salvation does involve a cost. It does cost you something. But it's just *not* a cost in terms of payment.** Rather it's a cost that results from having received salvation freely by grace.
- ❖ Think about it this way. Picture a king who's at war with his enemies. He has the superior army. He has the upper hand. Victory is inevitable. And yet he wants to minimize bloodshed so he offers his enemies peace at the right price. Peace with the king involves a cost – a cost of purchase. You have to purchase that peace.
 - ▶ Now compare that to another king in the same situation. But instead he offers his enemies peace – out of sheer grace. There's no price. No payment. But as a result of receiving his peace, they have to lay down their weapons and pledge full allegiance. There's no price but there's still a cost.

- ❖ **In the first scenario, it was a cost of *purchase*. But in the second, it's a cost of *surrender*.** And there's a huge difference. That difference is what lies at the very heart of the Gospel. **The good news of Christianity is that my salvation was purchased in full by another.** Jesus paid it all. With his own life when he died on the cross in my place. And he rose from the grave to demonstrate that God accepted his payment in my place. That's why we say salvation is free. It's without cost. That is, without cost of purchase on my part.
 - ▶ But then having freely received salvation, having entered the kingdom without cost, I'm now commanded to cast down my crown – my rule as king over the kingdom of me – and to humbly follow a new King. This is the cost of surrender. **The King demands full control over all my decisions, full authority over all my relationships, full mastery over all my money, full lordship over all my life.**

- ❖ What is this going to look like? I can imagine for some of you this will mean being willing to surrender **your reputation**. *Are you willing to suffer insults, ridicule, the loss of reputation all for the sake of God?* If you're hesitant to publicly identify yourself as Christian, if you're afraid of what your coworkers or classmates might think if they knew what you believe, that means your reputation is more valuable than God. You love it more.

- ❖ Perhaps for others you'll have to surrender **your incessant drive to succeed**, to be the best in your class or in your field. If you've cast down your crown and placed yourself under God's reign, then you have to live by his standards. That means there are ethical boundaries you won't cross. You'll feel the pressure to cut corners, to fudge numbers, to bend rules, but you won't go there. Why? Because you're no longer in charge. You're no longer king.
 - ▶ We could go on about your relationships, your marriage, your children, your finances, your appetite, your sexual desires, your health, your comfort and security – you'll have to surrender it all.

- ❖ Again don't get the wrong impression. We're not saying you have to choose between loving God or loving your spouse. Valuing God or valuing your family or your career. That's not what the parables are getting at. **Entering the kingdom of heaven and following its King doesn't mean you have to leave all the things you love behind at the entrance.**
 - ▶ By surrendering these things we're talking about surrendering your control over them. Releasing your grip on them. You're not the king anymore. You're not in charge. You can't just do with them as you please.

- ❖ That shouldn't be a surprise. That's what happens when you enter a new kingdom and submit under the authority of its King. It just makes sense really. **Can you imagine a King who welcomes you into his kingdom but then lets you walk around with a crown on your head acting like you own the place?** That's unthinkable. God is the King of heaven.
 - ▶ The choice before you is straightforward. It doesn't matter how you got here. You're standing at the entrance to the kingdom. Count the cost. You have two choices. You either keep your own crown and be your own king OR you surrender it all and put yourself under the authority of a new King.

The Satisfying Joy

- ❖ The whole point of these parables is that the Christian is someone who counts it all up and considers the substantial cost of the kingdom to pale in comparison to the superior gain. So that he surrenders all. He casts down that crown – not begrudgingly – but in his joy! **The Christian is someone who recognizes and experiences the satisfying joy of the kingdom.**
 - ▶ Look back at v44. Notice the key phrase “*in his joy*”. The man went “*in his joy*” and sold all he had to buy the field. We’re not given the impression that he dragged his feet trying to decide what to do. He didn’t hem and haw over the pros and cons.

- ❖ No, it was an easy choice. From the moment he perceived its superior value, he couldn't wait for the chance to sell everything he owned to get that treasure. Renounce all I have? Sure, that’s not asking too much. That’s a good deal really.
 - ▶ Just think about it. **Would you consider something that costs five hundred dollars expensive? It all depends on what it is.** If I told you it was a pair of socks, then yes that's an expensive five hundred dollar pair of socks. Too costly for me. And if I had to buy it – let's just say it was the last pair of socks in the world and my feet were about to freeze off – okay I'll buy it, but I'll be bitter.
 - But now if you told me it was for a brand new 15" Macbook Pro, well that's a deal! Five hundred dollars is nothing. That's not expensive at all! I'd write that check in joy! You see, it all depends on perceived value. **If I truly value the object, then the cost – even a substantial cost – is negligible.** It's worth it. I'd gladly make that exchange in joy.

- ❖ **Like I said earlier, unless you love God as your greatest treasure, you'll always considered the cost of giving up your crown and giving him full control to be too high.** Even if you enter anyways because you feel like you have no other choice, you're going to do so begrudgingly. But that's the furthest thing from true Christianity. That's not what a God-loving disciples look like.
 - ▶ For some reason we tend to picture the guy in this parable sad and dejected as he’s heading over to the pawn shop. He’s got tears in his eyes as he’s pawning off his most prized possessions – his vinyl record collection or baseball cards or his PS4 (whatever works for you).
 - In our minds, the joy only comes *after* he’s sign the deed to the land and dug that treasure back up. The joy is an afterthought – after you’re in full possession of your treasure.

- ❖ But that’s not what's going on here. In v44, the joy is present the very moment he perceives the superior value of that treasure. He hasn’t sold anything yet. He’s not in full possession of the treasure. And yet there’s already an all-satisfying joy welling up inside.
 - ▶ *Do you know this joy I'm talking about?* You don't have to wait till the end, till heaven, to experience this. **This is the joy of discipleship. Yes, there's a cost of discipleship. Oh but it pales in comparison to the joy!**

- ❖ Listen, if you're sad and dejected because now you realize just how costly it is to be a disciple, because now you see how much it costs to have God in your life, then he is not your true treasure. At least not yet.
 - ▶ A God-loving disciple is going to say, "Even though I don't have full possession of my inheritance. Even though I only see now in a mirror dimly. Even though I don't see God face to face. I don't have full possession of my treasure. Yet I perceive its superior value by faith. By faith I know it's mine. That's where my joy comes from."

- ❖ A God-loving disciple is able to say along with the prophet Habakkuk, "*Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.*" (Hab. 3:17-18) In other words, you have nothing in your hands. You've sold off everything. And yet you rejoice in the Lord. You take joy in the God of your salvation.

- ❖ I understand if that sounds foreign to you. But that can be you. That can be the beat of your heart. **By the power and grace of God, you can have that kind of joy.** But you might be sitting here thinking, "That sounds great, but I'm so far from there. My heart is dry right now. I don't have that joy. My relationship with God *does* feel like a chore. It feels begrudged. I don't have that kind of love for God. I guess because I can't see his superior value. All I can think about is the substantial cost and it feels too much. What do I do?"

- ❖ This is what you do. **You start by confessing and repenting of the main problem in your life.** And it's not a behavior. It's not an action. It's not something you're not doing. Your main problem is something you're not feeling.
 - ▶ **Martin Luther used to say if you can manage to keep the first commandment, you'll keep the other nine.** If you put no other gods before him, if you value God and love him above all, then you'll keep the rest. If you have the right heart – a heart passionately in love with God – then all of your actions will be righteous.

- ❖ So the main problem is your heart. It's hard. It's cold towards God. You're lacking in love. That's what you need to confess and repent of. That's where you start.
 - ▶ But that's not where we usually start, is it? **We usually go to God and start rattling off all our failures.** Repenting of all our shortcomings. I repent for my bitterness towards my parents. I repent for yelling at my kids. I repent for not praying enough, reading my Bible enough, going to church enough, etc.
 - This kind of repentance is not bad. You should repent of these things, but with this kind of repentance you just end up feeling worse. This is not where you need to start.

- ❖ **You need to start by going to God and repenting of your lack of love.** You tell God, "I'm sorry Lord that my heart is so hard, so cold towards you. Sorry for not loving you like you deserve. I repent of my lack of love."

- ❖ **And the amazing thing is that your repentance for lack of love is what kickstarts new love.** Your repentance for a hard heart is what begins the softening process. Repent of a cold heart and that's what begins to melt you.
 - ▶ When you have a spat with your spouse, how you make up? The best way is start with apologizing for not being loving. You tell your wife, "I'm sorry. I haven't loved you as you deserve." That'll break the ice. That'll soften your heart towards her. It can't stay hardened or cold for much longer if you're feeling like that.

- ❖ So maybe you're a Christian who realizes that your heart has grown cold towards God OR maybe you're not sure where you stand with God but you're sure you don't love him like these men in the parable. Wherever you're coming from. However you got here. The question is: ***What is God to you? Do you love him as your greatest treasure?***