

The Pearl Trader
(Context: Matthew 13:44–46.)

God's kingdom is like a trader seeking fine pearls. Upon finding one pearl of great value, he liquidated his assets and bought it. (Matthew 13:45–46. My paraphrase.)

The pearl trader knew his business. He had studied pearls, gained experience in the markets of the Middle East, and learned to recognize the best. His life revolved around pearls. He traveled almost constantly, rarely spending more than a few nights at home. He knew how to trade: buy low, sell high, cut losses, and invest in pearls that would appreciate and had a market. Passage on ships, inns along the way, wining and dining suppliers and buyers; they were all tax deductions from his profit. What remained after covering family living expenses was reinvested in his search for the best.

I used to think that Jesus' parables of the treasure (the men got excited about buried treasure) and the pearl (the ladies' eyes lit up) were simply about the value of the kingdom of God. Certainly that's part of the lesson; it's so valuable that it costs us everything we have—our entire life.

There are no Black Friday sales; it will never be reduced to clear. If we fail to pay full price, we receive a cheap imitation, often a religious substitute for the real thing.

However, we can't buy a place in the kingdom as though it's an exotic timeshare. It's not about a financial transaction. There is a better way to understand its value—the extent to which we are willing to exchange what we already have for it. The men in the parables sold all they had to acquire the treasure and the pearl. Their life goal was to obtain the most precious thing possible. (And surely the cultural assumption was that their extended family and friends would get a share.) For us, it might be giving up bad things or removing a clutter of harmless things, but it's about making space for God. So, what do we have that we could exchange? Our list probably looks something like this:

The house with its furniture, decorations, outbuildings, land, and those beautiful flowering shrubs.

Our toys and tools.

Those memorabilia and family heirlooms.

Investments.

Perhaps a business.

Relationships.

The list represents securities, comforts, conveniences, luxuries, status symbols, and even our identity. Life is not things. Nevertheless, think about how many of our activities are geared to supporting, protecting, or maintaining the list that, in part, defines us. Does God expect us to liquidate everything we have and, in some mystical way, exchange it all for His kingdom? How far should we stretch Jesus' parables?

Only when we understand what God's kingdom looks like on earth, can we grasp what exchanging everything we have means. Jesus invites His listeners to put themselves in the place of the pearl dealer. That man was focused. He worked to live, *and* he lived to work. Jesus wasn't talking about becoming homeless and penniless just to hold a priceless pearl; He was talking about aligning everything with the kingdom. Are we willing to relinquish whatever possessions and activities do not serve kingdom purposes to make room for things that do?¹

¹ Matt. 16:24–26; 19:12 talk of other sacrifices.

Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” He explained that our Father will supply everything we need to do His business. We are told to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, and strength because the King and His kingdom are the inseparable, priceless treasure. Gaining a relationship with Him and joining His kingdom business (all expenses paid) . . . there’s nothing like it.

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