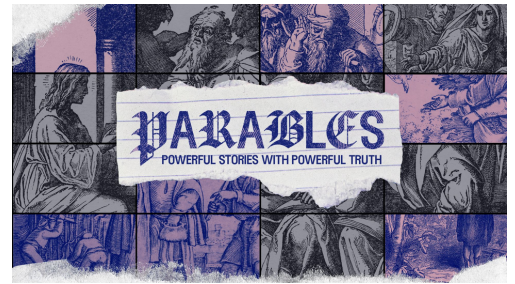


Things of Great Value

Matt. 13:44-46

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



Perseverance, significance, meaning, and hope. Who wouldn't want those qualities or virtues to be equally present in their lives? Who wouldn't be overjoyed and exuberant at finding a portion of any of those through life's experiences? The great twentieth-century American poet Tom Petty sang of this very truth that there is great joy in finding something worthwhile in and through the experiences of your life. In the song, *Learning to Fly*, Petty writes a philosophically positive creed for life. Having come through some very difficult experiences, Petty dreams of and longs for the joyous treasure of finding freedom, confidence, and significance once again. He sings,

**Well, I started out ... Down a dirty road
Started out all alone ... And the sun went down
As I crossed the hill ... And the town lit up. The world got still**

**I'm learning to fly ... But I ain't got wings
Coming down ... Is the hardest thing**

**Well the good ol' days ... May not return
And the rocks might melt ... And the sea may burn**

But, I'm learning to fly.

He concludes the song by writing,

**So I started out ... For God knows where
I guess I'll know ... When I get there**

**I'm learning to fly ... Around the clouds
But what goes up ... Must come down**

What Petty zeros in on in this song is a truth that has been true for a very long time. There is joy in finding something of great value, something that is transcendent because this life is full of heartaches and hurt. Jesus understood that, and that is why he compared the Kingdom of Heaven to finding a treasure in a field or a pearl of unimaginable value. Things that were so valuable that the finder would sell all they had just to acquire them. The secret, though, is while Petty concludes that all good things come to an end, Jesus teaches that when we find the joy of the Kingdom, it has no end. And that **substantial joy is a treasure** worth finding.

1. The value of joy.

a. What is joy?

i. A simple definition - A state of sufficient satisfaction in God.

1. Joy is rooted in the awareness of our identity in Christ as Christians.
 - a. It is a word with great theological significance, because everywhere in these documents joy in the true sense, both individual and corporate, **is rooted in an unshakable faith in God and originates in a realization that God has acted and is acting to save those who put their trust in him.**¹
2. Joy is the sense or state of gladness or elation that people experience through their relationship with God and through good things in their lives.²
3. The response of joy, gladness, or happiness is not only a deep inward feeling, but is expressed in celebration when God's people gather together.³

ii. The Bible speaks of joy often.

1. OT – **139 mentions** of the words or various Hebrew words for joy.
 - a. There are 11 Hebrew words to express the different experiences we have with joy.
 - b. **All are rooted in the idea of the sufficiency of God's salvation.**
 - i. **Jer. 31:13 – Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.**
 - ii. **Isa. 12:3 – With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.**
 - iii. **Ps. 43:4 – Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.**
2. NT – **326 mentions** of the 5 Greek variants of the word, joy.
 - a. **Again, each is connected back to the sufficiency of God's salvation.**
 - b. Of the 326 occurrences of words for joy in the NT, 131 are found in the ten letters that are usually ascribed to Paul, namely forty percent.⁴
 - c. **Those who have come to experience God's grace, as Paul had done, know that, by standing firm in their faith (2 Cor 1:24), they can continue to celebrate the Christian life as a festival of joy (1 Cor 5:8), in perfect freedom from all anxious worries and fears.**⁵
 - i. **Matt. 2:10 – When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.**
 - ii. **Acts 13:52 – And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.**
 - iii. **1 Thes. 1:6 – And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit...**
 - iv. **1 Thes. 2:19-20 – For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰For you are our glory and joy.**

¹ Gerald F. Hawthorne, "Joy," *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, 600–601.

² Kenneth D. Litwak, "Joy," *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

³ Clinton E. Arnold, "Joy," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1022.

⁴ William G. Morrice, "Joy," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 511.

⁵ William G. Morrice, "Joy," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 512.

b. What does the Bible describe as joy?

- i. **A treasure and a field:** The man who discovers the treasure, like the merchant who purchases the pearl, stands for anyone who becomes a “child of the kingdom,” that is, a disciple of Jesus. In this sense, there are two foci to each parable, but it seems natural to formulate the parables’ message in one short sentence: ***The kingdom of God is so valuable that it is worth sacrificing anything to gain it.***⁶
 1. Finding such a treasure in the ancient world was the equivalent of winning the lottery.⁷
 - a. Sir 40:18: “Wealth and wages make life sweet, but better than either is finding a treasure.”⁸
 - i. Note; the book of Sirach is a compillation of ethical Jewish teachings from 250-120 BC.
 2. **Pearls were regarded as the most valuable objects in existence, so they became a figure of speech for something of supreme worth, which is the basis of this similitude.** The risks and rewards of being a merchant were both great. Some in the ancient world had little respect for merchants, as Sir 26:29 attests: “A merchant can hardly keep from wrongdoing, nor is a tradesman innocent of sin.” Most accept that the parable is about a wholesale dealer.⁹
- ii. **The plain truth** – In these two short parables, Jesus is telling us that there is substantial joy both in the action of finding the Kingdom and in living within the ethical and theological framework of the Kingdom.
 1. **He does this by comparing the kingdom to the most joyous experience a person could have, finding buried treasure and the most valuable commodity in antiquity, a pearl.**¹⁰
 - a. Note – Jesus is not teaching that a person can buy his way into the Kingdom of Heaven.

c. Endurance – James 1:2-3

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- i. Sometimes called “the Proverbs of the New Testament,” the book of James practically and faithfully reminds Christians how to live. From perseverance to true faith to controlling one’s tongue, submitting to God’s will, and having patience, this book aids readers in living authentically and wisely for Christ.¹¹
- ii. **What James speaks of is also affirmed by Paul. → We endure trials with joy.**
 1. Such hope can keep a believer joyful (Rom 12:12), for it includes not only the expectation of the coming of the deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ, to transfigure our physical bodies (Phil 3:20–21), but also assures us of joy in the world to come.

⁶ Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, Second Edition., 381.

⁷ Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, Second Edition., 241.

⁸ Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, Second Edition., 236.

⁹ Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, Second Edition., 250–251.

¹⁰ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, 359.

¹¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jas.

Provided we suffer with Christ here and now, we can expect to participate in his triumph hereafter. Such union with Christ is the heart of Paul's religion.¹²

iii. **Count it all joy...**

1. First, he calls his readers *my brothers and sisters*. The Greek word used here (*adelphoi*, sometimes translated 'brothers') addresses all the believers in the audience, both men and women, as siblings in the family of God. James addresses his readers fourteen times (three times with the qualification 'my dear') in this way, often to introduce a new section.
 - a. This affectionate address sets a strong pastoral tone for the many exhortations of the letter.
2. **And, second, he issues a command: *consider it pure joy*.** 'Pure' renders a Greek word (*pas*, sometimes translated 'all') that might stress the unmixed quality of joy—'count it *only* joy' or '*nothing but* joy'—but probably emphasizes rather the quality of the joy (NLT 'great joy').¹³
3. Suffering is a means by which faith, tested in the fires of adversity, can be purified of any dross and thereby strengthened. **The idea, then, is not that trials determine whether a person has faith or not. Rather they strengthen the faith that is already present.**¹⁴
4. *Perseverance* (*hypomonē*) is the intended outcome of this testing process.¹⁵
 - a. 'Steadfastness' (ESV), 'endurance' (NLT), 'staying power' (Ropes) and 'heroic endurance' (Dibelius) are attempts to capture the meaning of the word. → **This is not a meek response, but a strong response of great resolve.**
 - b. This steadfastness / endurance is the tangible expression of the substantial joy that is found through life in the Kingdom.

d. **Wisdom / Righteousness – Proverbs 10:28**

The hope of the righteous brings joy, but the expectation of the wicked will perish.

- i. **Wisdom is often defined as: The right application of knowledge.**
 1. How does Proverbs describe knowledge? → **1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.**
- ii. **This is also the motto of the Wisdom writings in general, and reappears, in substance, in 9:10; 15:33; Psalm 111:10; Job 28:28.**
- iii. *The beginning* (i.e. the first and controlling principle, rather than a stage which one leaves behind; cf. Eccl. 12:13) is not merely a right method of thought but a right relation: a worshipping submission (*fear*) to the God of the covenant, who has revealed himself by name (*the Lord*, i.e. Yahweh: Exod. 3:13–15). *Knowledge*, then, in its full sense, is a relationship, dependent on revelation and inseparable from character ('wisdom and training', 7b). When we fence off (as we must) limited fields of knowledge for special study, the missing context

¹² William G. Morrice, "Joy," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 512.

¹³ Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, Second edition., vol. 16, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015), 80.

¹⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, Second edition., vol. 16, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015), 81.

¹⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, Second edition., vol. 16, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015), 81.

must be remembered, or our knowing is precocious and distorted, as at the fall, and we end by knowing less (cf. 3:7; Rom. 1:21, 22), not more.¹⁶

1. Righteousness is always seen as a legal designation in the OT.

a. **You can only be proclaimed righteous by having found to have done right actions.**

b. **To do right actions you need right knowledge.**

c. **Right knowledge is rooted in knowing the Lord.**

iv. *The desire of the righteous* is also, ultimately, God; and 'they shall see his face'. 'In the end, that Face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised.'¹⁷

1. **Here in this verse we see the significant or substantial certainty the righteous are able to live with because their lives are rooted in the Lord.**

e. **God's presence – Psalms 21:6**

For you make him most blessed forever; you make him glad with the joy of your presence.

i. The rich blessings (v. 3a) are *unending* (v. 6a), giving the impression that the previous verses are only the tip of the iceberg. **What truly makes the king glad is the blessing of God's presence. God is with him and that is why the blessings flow.**

1. Joseph illustrates the connection between divine presence and blessing. In Genesis 39, the prosperity of Potiphar's household is clearly connected to God being 'with him' (vv. 2–3), as is Joseph's well-being when he was incarcerated in the prison (vv. 21, 23).¹⁸

ii. Knowing God is not just a means to access right knowledge, but is also expressed in enjoying God by being in relationship with him.

1. Clinical or academic knowledge vs. Intimate and personal knowledge.

a. **Intimate knowledge = Knowing and being known by God.**

i. Experiencing this is a tangible expression of substantial joy.

f. **The most valuable thing – Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**

¹³ The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

i. Ecclesiastes answers the question, what is the best life I can or should live? → I.e., What is the most worthwhile life?

ii. Fear God... The whole duty of man – If it is the 'beginning of wisdom' (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10) it also is *the end*, the conclusion; **no progress in the believer's life leaves it behind.**¹⁹

1. **Remember the instruction of James? → Produces a harvest of righteousness.**

¹⁶ Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 17, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, 56.

¹⁷ Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 17, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, 84–85.

¹⁸ Tremper Longman III, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 15–16, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 126.

¹⁹ Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 18, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 177.

- iii. Of the ninefold fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23, joy comes second in the list as one of three virtues of the inner life. **It comes as a close second to the greatest of them all, love, and is followed by peace.**²⁰
- iv. **The problem with most of us is that we would like a little of the kingdom as an add-on to the rest of our lives. We want to hedge our bets. You cannot hedge your bets with the kingdom. This parable urges us to abandon what we thought was the focus of life and focus entirely on what God is doing with the kingdom.**²¹
 - 1. **The joy of the Kingdom is found in the deep saturation that comes through identity transformation.**

2. Joy of an identity found in the kingdom. (Three pictures)

- a. If the Kingdom contains substantial joy, how do we know what it should look like?
 - i. Three pictures of substantial joy found in the identity of the Kingdom.
- b. **Jesus – Luke 4 temptation.**
 - i. **Freed from power. – The great irony of the temptation in the desert is that the devil never offers Jesus something that is not already his.**
 - ii. **Substantial joy sets us free to live under the sufficient power and authority of our Father, and not feel as if we need to constantly gain more power and more influence to become complete. → This is the tragedy of Adam’s fall.**
 - 1. Jesus was freed from the allure and draw of momentary power because in his humanity he understood the significance of his identity in the Kingdom.
 - 2. **Jesus is centrally connected to the Father, and is not only focused on doing the Father’s will, but also bringing the Father glory.**
 - a. **John 8:54-⁵⁴ Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God**
 - iii. **Jesus’ humanity on display in the desert:**
 - 1. Heb. 2:17-18 “¹⁷ Therefore he had to be **made like his brothers** in **every respect**, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because **he himself has suffered when tempted**, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”
 - 2. Heb 4:15 – “¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who **in every respect has been tempted as we are**, yet without sin.”
 - 3. Phil. 2:6-8 - “⁶ ... who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but **emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant**, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And **being found in human form**, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”
 - iv. **Jesus routinely submitted to the Father’s will.**
 - 1. His baptism and call into public ministry. → Jesus accepts the role as messiah.
 - 2. The desert, he withdraws in obedience to the Spirit’s leading, and to be filled up for the task ahead.
 - 3. He claims that he cannot do anything apart from the Father. (**Jn. 5:30**)

²⁰ William G. Morrice, “Joy,” ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 512.

²¹ Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, Second Edition. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2012), 384–385.

- a. ³⁰ “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.
 - b. And believes the same for us: Jn. 15:6
 - i. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.
 - 4. In the garden he submits to the Father’s will: “Take this cup...” Luke 22:42
 - a. saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”
 - v. Obedience isn’t an afterthought it is instead the very love language of God.
 - 1. John 4:34
 - a. Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.
- c. John to the church in Ephesus – 1 Jn.
 - i. Freed to love those who are hard to love.
 - 1. Substantial joy leads us to a place of deep and steady love for each other and especially for those who are hard to love. → Why? Because the love of the Father is being made perfect in us and our joy has been made complete in Jesus.
 - ii. John is writing to a group of Christians that are being torn apart from the inside.
 - 1. John loves this group as he likely planted the church.
 - 2. The church is going to through a church split over doctrinal issues and a deep relational wound has opened up. → They are hurting and not sure if they can love each other in fellowship any longer. ²²
 - iii. 1:4 – ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.
 - 1. 2:5 – ⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected
 - 2. 2:10 – Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.
 - a. Substantial joy allows us to be generous with grace, patience, and tolerance in an age that demands retribution at every turn.
 - iv. There is something fundamentally different to joy.
 - 1. Joy is lasting, deep, and strengthening. Happiness is fleeting, temporary, and often leaves us unfulfilled.
 - 2. C.S. Lewis describes joy this way, “All joy reminds. It is never a possession, always a desire for something longer ago or further away or still ‘about to be.’” ²³
- d. Paul – Acts 20:24
 - i. Freed from prestige. – Substantial joy sets me free from having to earn my worth and it puts my life in the proper perspective of eternity.
 - 1. If there was anyone who was in a position in the early church to flaunt their clout, it was Paul.
 - a. Just consider his lineage and the social clout and prestige he had
 - b. Phil 3:5-11

³ For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of

²² Gary M. Burge, “John, Letters Of,” ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 590.

²³ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*

the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

2. Acts 20:24 – Paul’s life verse.
 - a. ²⁴ **But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.**
3. **He did not regard his own *life* as a *precious* possession to be held on to at all costs.**
This corresponds to the attitude expressed in his letters (2 Cor. 4:7–5:10; 6:4–10; 12:9f.; Phil. 1:19–26; 2:17; 3:8; Col. 1:24). What did matter was that he should accomplish his course (2 Tim. 4:7) by faithfully performing the service which had been laid on him by the Lord at his conversion, namely to preach *the gospel of the grace of God*.
4. **Paul understood that the greatest and most significant standing he could ever gain, did not or would not come through his pedigree or achievements. Instead, he experienced the substantial joy that comes from experience the standing that one gains through Christ.**
 - a. He would gladly exchange and give up all worldly standing, prestige, power, influence, and status to experience the significance of Kingdom life in an ever-increasing way.