**STRIKING IT RICH**

**(Matthew 13:44-46)**

Have you noticed that when Hollywood finds a formula that works, it starts churching out movies with similar plots? If you haven’t learned this yet, let me be the one to break this to you: The goal of Hollywood is not to make great movies; their goal is to make a great deal of money. That being the case, they find out what stories are selling, and then they make more of those.

One of the tried and true movie plots through the years has been the search for buried treasure. With some variation, of course, here are some titles that have that as their basic plot:

* *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (and the other Indiana Jones’ movies
* *Pirates of the Caribbean*
* *Romancing the Stone*
* *Three Kings*
* *National Treasure*
* *Sahara*

And there are a host of others.

Such movies are popular because they touch something deep within us. We are naturally drawn to the idea of digging in the ground and finding something of great worth. As a child, who didn’t want to dig a hole in the backyard and find a dinosaur bone or a treasure chest? Who hasn’t wanted to find a treasure map where X marks the spot of an incredible treasure of incomparable worth?

This story of buried treasure isn’t anything new. One of the stories Jesus told in Matthew 13 involves the finding of a great treasure. He told this story because in His day, such stories were commonplace.

One reason they were so common is that in the ancient world you couldn’t take your treasures to the local bank and have it secured in a large and guarded vault. There were none. People routinely buried their treasures in the ground.

Think with me about where the nation of Israel was located. Israel was the land bridge between the rich kingdom of Egypt and the great empires to the north (successively, there were the Assyrian, Babylonian, Chaldean, Macedonian, and Roman Empires). Vast armies would traipse through the little land of Israel with great regularity as they waged war against one another. If you had something of value and you knew soldiers were going to be marching through your backyard, you would bury your treasure, and then go find someplace to hide.

Not everyone who went into hiding made it back home; so, it was not unusual for buried treasure to remain buried for great lengths of time.

Buried treasure is still being found in the land of Israel to this day. Just a few years ago, as archeologists were digging in the ruins of a house in the ancient city of Caesarea by the Sea, they unearthed a large cache of coins that had been buried underneath the floor of that house.

People enjoy digging for buried treasure. When I was young, I remember seeing commercials for metal detectors. Those became popular. People bought them wit the idea of becoming amateur treasure hunters.

People want to strike it rich to become wealthy instantly. Instead of buying a metal detector, people today are more apt to buy lottery tickets or go to a casino.

This idea of getting rich quick isn’t new either. Jesus capitalized on that desire by telling a certain story in Matthew 13. It was familiar story, but Jesus changed the story a bit from how it was usually told.

Traditionally, the story went along the lines of: You are working in the field, plowing the ground and planting your crops. As you are working diligently, your plow hits a solid object. You think it is a stone because you have had to dig several of those out already. As you began to dig this one out, you discover that it is not a stone; it is a chest. The chest is full of gold and silver. You have become rich. Your riches are a reward for your hard work.

In the story Jesus tells, however, he says nothing about working. We are going to read two stories that are somewhat similar, but there are some important differences. Let’s look at Matthew 13:44-46.

As we work through these two stories, I want to emphasize two major ideas.

1. **WE CAN STRIKE IT RICH WHEN WE FIND THE KINGDOM.**

According to Jesus, the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God, which is the same thing, is something of unimaginable value. In the first story, Jesus compares the Kingdom to a treasure that is accidentally found. In the second story, the Kingdom is compared to a perfect pearl that is found by a merchant who searches for fine pearls, but this one pearl surpasses all that he has ever seen or ever owned.

Now, let’s be clear what the Kingdom is. The Kingdom has been defined as the ‘King’s domain.” The Kingdom is wherever Jesus is ruling and reigning. If Jesus is sitting upon the throne of your life, that is where the Kingdom is. The Kingdom is not a piece of property; it is a place of rulership.

There is nothing more valuable in life than to have Jesus ruling and reigning over your life. Wouldn’t it be great to have a boss:

* Who never lies or misleads you
* Who never makes a mistake in judgment
* Who looks out for your best welfare,
* Who never takes you for granted
* Who rolls up His sleeves and helps you with your projects
* Who pays you more than what you are really worth
* Who encourages you when you are down, who forgives you when you mess up, who helps you to become all you can be?

Would you ever leave your job if you had a boss like that? Wouldn’t you do your very best if you had a boss like that? Jesus is that, and so much more. There is nothing greater or more valuable than the rulership of Jesus in your life.

Two types of people are mentioned in our three verses. **The first is a surprised finder.** He wasn’t looking for a treasure. As far as we know, he wasn’t even out working in his neighbor’s field. Maybe he was taking a short-cut on his way somewhere else. The text doesn’t say the treasury was buried. Maybe it was stuck away in a dilapidated barn, and maybe the fellow was snooping around without permission. We don’t know where the treasure was and how the man found it. The only thing we know is that he wasn’t looking for any treasure, when lo’ and behold, he came upon it.

What did he do when he found the treasure? Did he go to the owner of the field and say, “Guess what I found?” No. Did he go to the authorities and say, “I found something that somebody may be missing.” No.

What he did is that he took it and hid it someplace else. If he found it in the barn, then he took it to the abandoned hen house and piled debris over it. If the weather had partially uncovered it from the ground, he dug it up and buried it elsewhere.

Then, what did he do? He liquidated all his assets into ready cash and made an offer on the property. Once he bought the property, everything on it was his, including the newly re-buried treasure. But that treasure was not his until he bought the field. Until then, it was only potentially his.

When you learn about who Jesus is and what He has to offer you, His Kingdom is only potentially yours. It doesn’t become yours until you give all that you are to Him.

The surprised finder teaches us that we can come upon the Kingdom without even looking for it. The reason we can find the Kingdom without looking for it is that the King just happened to be looking for us.

In Luke 15 Jesus told three parables back-to-back, and all three are about the same thing—something that is lost that is later found. In the first case, it is a lost sheep. A shepherd has 100 sheep. One of them goes missing. Presumably, that sheep has wandered off, and being dumb as sheep are, that poor sheep is never going to find his way back on his own. The shepherd goes out and looks for that one sheep. He finds it and brings it back to the safety of the fold. He and his friends rejoice over the lost sheep that was found.

In the next story, a woman has 10 silver coins, each of significant value to her. One of them goes missing. She can’t find it anywhere. She concludes it has fallen on the floor. The floor is made of uneven laid stone. It would be easy for the coin to fall in a crevice. She concentrates her gaze as she sweeps every inch of the floor, and eventually she spots the coin. She scoops in up with joy, puts it in a secure place, and calls her friends with the good news. They have a party because what was lost has been found.

In the third story, there is a lost son. He greedily takes his share of the inheritance while his dad is still living, and he leaves home. Instead of going out to look for him, the father decides it is wiser to stay at home, pray for him, and wait for him to come back. The son is gone for some time, during which time he wastes everything he has been given. He gets hungry. He misses the comfort of his father’s house. Finally, he decides to go back home and ask if he could return, not as a son, but as one of his dad’s hired hands. One day the dad is outside looking down the road where he had last seen his son. He sees a figure approaching from a distance. Somehow, he knows it is his boy. He runs to him, hugs him, and welcomes him home as a son, not a servant. He throws a party because his son was as good as dead, and now, he is alive again.

Jesus specializes in finding lost things. Jesus said, “I have come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

We find the Kingdom when the King finds us. Has the King found you yet?

In the first parable, the story of the treasure, there was a surprised finder. In the second parable, the story of the exquisite pearl, we have **a sincere seeker.** The man in this story is a pearl merchant. He has bought, sold, and traded pearls for years. One day he comes upon the most perfect pearl he has ever seen. This one pearl is beyond compare, and it commands an enormous price. The only way he can afford to obtain this pearl is to sell every pearl he in his collection along with everything else he owns. Gladly, he does so. He sells out lock, stock, and barrel, as they say. He has a going out of business sale, everything must go. Everything does go, and he gives everything he has to make this one pearl his.

Some people in this world are seekers. They know there is more to life than what they are experiencing. They know there has to be a Creator. Deep down, they know there is a God. They are seeking meaning and purpose. We read a promise from God in Jeremiah 29:13, “You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.”

While some are just surprised finders, there are others who are sincere seekers. I think that most of us here are surprised finders. I didn’t launch an expedition in search of the Kingdom. At the age of 8, the King showed up at the door of my heart and knocked.

When you come across the Kingdom, at that point, the Kingdom, the rule of Christ over your life exists only as a possibility. You can strike it rich. It is like finding a treasure in a field that belongs to someone else. It is like being shown a perfect pearl that is owned by another. That brings us to the second truth I want to impress upon you.

1. **WE DO STRIKE IT RICH WHEN WE GAIN THE KINGDOM.**

There was something the finder of the treasure had to do for the treasure to become his. There was something the collector of pearls had to do for that one perfect pearl to become his. Listen again to the last part of v. 44 and also v. 46.

It is clear that:

* A transaction was required.
* A deal had to be made.
* An agreement had to be reached.

In both instances, the person gave all he had to become the owner of that which he truly desired.

Is this passage teaching that we have to buy our way into the Kingdom? Not at all. No matter how wealthy you become, you will never be able to afford God’s kingdom.

We often say that salvation is free. That is only partly true because forgiveness and a relationship with God through Christ are not for sale. The fuller truth is, those things have already been purchased, and the purchase price was costly.

One of my favorite hymns is “Jesus Paid It All.” We read in 1 Corinthians 6:20 that we were bought with a price. We learn in 1 Peter 1:18-19 that we were ransomed but not with silver and gold. Rather, Christ redeemed us at the cost of His own blood.

While our salvation has been paid for by Jesus, there is something we must give Him. All Jesus asks is that we give Him everything. We give Him:

* Our Past
* Our Sin
* Our Hope and Dreams
* Our Gifts and Abilities
* Our Family and Career
* Everything we are and have
* All we ever will be and will ever have.

Let me reframe this transaction. We give Jesus what we cannot keep. He gives us what we cannot lose. If you hold on to your life and your possessions, you will lose them one day in death. If you give to Jesus all you are and have, He will give you true life and eternal rewards. Those are things you cannot and will not lose.

This past week I came across a story of some men who were on a golf vacation. One day, they were returning from the course, when they spotted a woman standing on her front lawn, looking at the smoldering ruins of her house that had burned to the ground the day before. The men stopped to make sure she was OK. They men felt for her. They each took out a few bills from their wallets and handed it to the woman.

As they were driving away, one of the men said, “Guys, we can do better than that. Let’s give her all they money we have on us.” The men agreed. One man wrote out a check for $1000. They pooled it together, turned around, and drove back. One of the men approached the lady and said, “I’m sorry, Ma’am, but we have made a mistake, and we are going to have to ask for our money back.”

The woman looked at the men with a bit of surprise on her face, but she reached out and returned the money the men had given her. The man took it, added it to all they had collected, and with a smile gave her the far more generous gift.

God has given you your life, your family, your job, your home, and everything else you have, but he wants it back. All of it. If you will give it all back to Him, He will give you far more than you ever dreamed possible.

I close with the story of Carl and Hans. Carl was a rich landowner. He often would ride horseback around his vast estate congratulating himself on his magnificent wealth. One day, while riding around his estate on his favorite horse when he saw old Hans. Hans was a poor, tenant farmer. Hans was sitting underneath the shade of a tree with his head bowed. Hans looked up. Seeing Carl, he explained, “I was just thanking God for my food.”

Carl sneered, “If that was all I had to eat, I wouldn’t feel like giving thanks.”

“God has given me everything I need,” Hans replied, “and I am thankful for it.” Hans added, “It is strange you should come by today for I had a dream last night. In my dream, a voice told me, ‘The richest man in the valley will die tonight.’ I don’t know what it means, but I thought I ought to tell you.”

Carl answered, “Dreams are nonsense,” and with that, he galloped off. Secretly, Carl was troubled by Hans’ words: “The richest man in the valley will die tonight.” He knew there was no man in the valley as wealthy as he. Carl invited his doctor to his home that evening.

Following a through examination, the doctor said, “Carl, you are as strong and as healthy as a horse. I can assure you, you are not going to die tonight.” Nevertheless, at Carl’s invitation, the doctor stayed and they played cards through the night.

When the sun rose the next morning, the doctor departed. An hour or two later, a messenger arrived at Carl’s door. The messenger explained, “It’s about old Hans. He died last night in his sleep.”

If you want to become rich with a wealth you cannot lose, give yourself completely to the Lord. Ask Him to be your Savior and your boss. Let Him sit upon the throne of your life. Let Him assume the steering wheel of your life.