Series: Kingdom Come

Sermon: The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and Pearl of Great Price

Scripture: Matthew 13:44-46

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Let me open with a few thoughts:

All through history followers of Jesus have used their unique spiritual experiences to compare and compete when they should have been celebrating each other.

What if God likes to write a billion different creative love stories?

Where we see God.

Opening Illustration:

Back in college I played in a band. As I have shared before we spent a few summers traveling on behalf of the university I attended recruiting at Christian camps. There was one night we were practicing in a literal upper room and God moved in a powerful way with our team. It was well after midnight, and we thought it good to seal this moment with communion. So, long after the sun set a handful of emotional guys broke bread together after spending a few hours worshiping in a literal upper room. We had led worship in many settings, but this felt uniquely spiritual to me.

It was amazing.

Like any good young Christian, I couldn’t wait to tell others about our experience. With good intentions we wanted others to have our experience too. So, like any young leader, I put the pressure on.

You can’t rush worship services.

You have to make lots of space for the spirit.

You have to have times of passionate and honest confession.

You have to play new music. You know “new wineskin” and all. God isn’t using old music anymore.

Oh, and you definitely need a candle, for some reason the Holy Spirit needs a candle?

Alright, all sarcasm aside.

We did what every other person who has a profound move of God does. We want others to have it too! We just think the conditions were the reason for God’s move. Like the many good intentioned Pharisees of old we think we have to get it right for God to move.

Then something happened.

Years later, after many passionate conversations about the new right way for God to move, I held my first child. With no modern worship music playing, no candle, and no service, I held my child. This moment was also a holy moment. God moved in my heart in a profound way. So many things took on new meaning and so many other things I thought were most important lost their primacy in my heart.

Here is the wonderful and complicated truth. I fully believe God did move in those unique and glorious ways. Both of them. What young Mike got wrong was truly believing his experiences are superior to others and others have to experience God just like I did to have it really count.

This compare and compete is everywhere.

The immature Pentecostals imply the stoic Anglicans are empty. The immature Baptists butcher the Pentecostals for their mysterious theology. The immature Catholics are certain God moves only in their systems and cranky old country Holiness folks still think God can only reveal himself in an air condition-less white tabernacle, the preacher in a full suit and tie in the middle of the summer.

Even individually the more introverted academic among us bemoan the inconsistent emotions of others and the passionate at heart constantly imply the stoic followers of Jesus are spiritless.

This begs a great question.

How does God reveal, call and revive people in the Bible?

Here are a few examples… prepare for some truth followed by sarcasm.

1. Visions and dreams: Daniel’s visions: Daniel 7:1-28; Joseph’s dreams: Genesis 37:1-11 (So, for revival we all need to be asleep or in a trance?)
2. Audible voices when we are alone: God’s call to Samuel: 1 Samuel 3:1-10; Elijah on Mount Horeb. 1 Kings 19:11-13 (Wait, so real revival in a heart has to have God audibly speaking to us?)
3. Angelic visits: The angel Gabriel appears to Mary: Luke 1:26-38 (Hold on, real revival happens when you are alone doing chores and an angel shows up.)
4. Mountaintop experiences: Moses on Mount Sinai: Exodus 19:16-20. Jesus’ transfiguration: Matthew 17:1-9 (Nature! Yes… Nothing like a good hike or being out in nature to start truly seeing God.)
5. Prophetic inspiration: Many prophetic books in the Bible are the recorded words of prophets speaking on God’s behalf. Examples include Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. (I get it, we need to get up in front of people who are against God and speak God’s truths against them.)
6. Theophanies: Pillar of cloud and fire and a burning bush. Exodus 13:21-22; Exodus 3:1-10 (Um, follow the clouds to follow the Spirit?)
7. Prayer and Worship: The Lord’s Prayer: Matthew 6:9-13, Worship in spirit and truth: John 4:23-24 (Ah, yes. Memorize scripture and rest deeply in the words of Christ in community. I do like this one. This isn’t sarcastic.)
8. What about fighting with God? Jacob Wrestling with God: Genesis 32 (One more sarcastic statement… what about fighting with God? That’s when you know you have really met God. You have to get alone and fight out your frustration with God. That’s where real change happens.)

What about more modern Christians?

How did revival or divine revelation start for them?

John Wesley:

John Wesley’s journal entry for May 24, 1738, contains his own account of the “Aldersgate experience.” Here is an excerpt from his journal describing the event in his heart in this Bible and Prayer study:

“About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

(That’s it, small group Bible studies are the way.)

C.S. Lewis found Jesus in hearty conversations with other intellectuals, most notably J.R.R. Tolkien. Lewis says his profound moment of conversion was in 1931 while having a late-night conversation with J.R.R Tolkien and Hugo Dyson at Oxford. He describes it as being “kicked”.

(No, it’s having a sharp and intense theological debate with academics. That’s how great men and women come to life spiritually.)

Azusa Street Revival in LA California in 1906 was an inner-city black church prayer meeting led by William Seymour.

(Here it is, you have to have a non-official church and a poor minority pastor who is praying in the Spirit for a broken city. This is actually really good. But as we can see… it’s the guaranteed magic way to conjure up God.)

Let me offer a thought.

What if God likes to write a billion different creative love stories?

We also use our spiritual experiences to compare and compete when we should be celebrating the glorious unique way God calls billions of people to himself.

Let’s go to the text:

Lectio:

Matthew 13:44–46 (ESV):

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

44 “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Value

45 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, 46 who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. [[1]](#footnote-2)

Meditatio:

* The “treasure” and the “pearl” are the kingdom of God. When both of these people find it they realize it’s their greatest asset.
* Notice the difference between the two parables. The first man stumbled across the treasure, the second was seeking. The first wasn’t looking. The second man was a seeker who finally found the perfect pearl.
* Notice that spiritual wealth stands above all other forms of prosperity.
  + “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” -Jim Elliot, Personal journal and missionary work in Ecuador. Jim ultimately died at the hands of the Huaorani Tribe in the Ecuadorian rainforests while serving as a missionary.
* Notice their joy.
  + Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)

“looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Oratio:

* If you read this and think that seeing God requires you to buy land, look for buried gold, or buy a boat and dive for pearls, you are missing the point. It’s not about gold, pearls, buying land or diving in the ocean. It’s not about modalities. It’s about finding God and what happens to you.
* We are so quick to think how God revealed himself to me is the only way or the best way God reveals himself. Here is the crazy thing. God even reveals himself at times to people who are in total rebellion. Think of the Egyptians during the Exodus, or Balaam’s Donkey or even Saul’s conversion.
* Don’t obsess over the things that will pass away (modalities) but center on the real lasting treasure, the things that never pass away (Matthew 6:19-21). It’s not primarily about guitars, hymns, suits and ties, highly structured church, relaxed church, or any denomination. It’s not about personality types, being single or being married. It’s also *NOT* about rejecting these things! It’s about seeing and leaning into God’s love story.
* God is the place where all the beauty comes from, and He likes to write a billion different creative love stories and He wants to write one with you!
* God refuses to let us make Him into an idol. He is a living being we relate to.

Actio:

* For those that have seen God move: Instead of competing, celebrate God’s glorious diverse tapestry of love stories.
* For those that have not seen God move: I want to pray for you, and I want you to keep searching. You may be like the man looking for the pearl of great price.
* If you would, stand and let me pray over you!

1. The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)