

The Pearl of Great Price

Rich Nathan

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Worship: Worship as a Lifestyle Series

Matthew 13:44-46

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

This weekend I think we have some flesh and blood examples of the parable that we just read — people who have decided to trade in the success, the security, and in many ways the lives that they have known and thoroughly enjoyed for a quarter of a century. We have some flesh and blood examples of people who are trading in their present lives believing that by doing so they can have more of God's Kingdom than by playing it safe.

Let me just talk about Danny and Penny for a moment. These are two people who had it made in the shade. They are working for a large and, I say this without any pride, really, but a very successful mega church. We are one of four or five of the largest non-Catholic churches in the state of Ohio. And because of their tenure here and the resource base, Danny and Penny pretty much could do whatever they wanted in ministry. If they wanted to go to a conference in South Africa, they could do it — and they did do it. And they went on safari, too. They had assistants and teams and facilities.

I mean, if Danny wanted to teach one of his GOW seminars — somebody advertised in the bulletin for him and someone else scheduled a room and someone else set the room up, someone else made coffee and put out snacks for the participants, and another person Xeroxed the notes and set them out, and someone did the sound — I mean for one Saturday seminar there easily are ten people that make the seminar a success. All Danny had to do was show up with his notes and try to sound reasonably intelligent.

Danny and Penny didn't have to worry about finances or capital campaigns or cleaning and maintaining toys for Children's Ministry rooms, or making sure the sermon is being translated for the hearing impaired, or deal with computer software glitches. They didn't have to worry about the million behind-the-scenes issues that make doing church in the 21st century a pretty complicated enterprise.

So why give it up? Why give up all the security and ease and comfort of a quarter of a century of close relationships and friendships? Danny and I have enjoyed a truly wonderful and very blessed friendship and partnership in ministry

for over 20 years. It is not a common thing. I can tell you because I talk to pastors all the time. It is not common. It is a peculiar grace that Danny and I have enjoyed the kind of relationship we've had all these years.

So, again, why give up all that they have and love to leave and go back to meeting in a school where they have to set up and tear down every week? They will have the hassle of dealing with school officials who decide, "Well, July 4th you can't meet, so you better scramble and meet somewhere else." And janitors who forget to set the temperature correctly, and you find out at the last minute that a few of the rooms are locked or haven't been cleaned.

Danny and Penny are now responsible for all the little micro details again. If something doesn't work, if someone is upset, as the senior pastor Danny is now going to be the lightning rod for every problem, for every upset. Email is going to be directed to him. If there is a change in the church that someone doesn't like, "It's you who did it to me, Pastor!"

So, why leave a great situation - many people would call Danny and Penny's positions plum jobs - to go and start a new church?

Or Craig Heselton? You know, if anyone's life has followed the American version of the success story, it is Craig's life. He did wonderfully well in college in a tough chemical engineering major. He went to work for a few chemical companies. He got his master's degree. He kept being promoted up the corporate ladder. He's been the top dog at his company locally for a number of years. He has been plant manager. There's nobody above him locally. He literally travels around the world for his company evaluating other companies that they can acquire.

He has all the perks. He has the great company car. He has the huge pension plan, and he has corporate passes to Muirfield during the tournament. He has an expense account. He has a great health plan and the big corporate salary.

Why at age 50, when you finally get what everyone else wants, why completely start over? Why start a new career? Why cut your salary in half and lose your corporate perks? I mean, there is no company car here. No more Muirfield. Your retirement is going to be a whole lot less comfortable. Ask Craig, why commit career suicide?

Why do people make the decisions that these two families have made? Why do folks toss away ease and security and decide of their own free will to get on the down escalator when everybody else is crowding on to the up escalator?

Why do we as a church keep refusing to do what most other churches do? Most churches just leave well enough alone. Why are the leaders of the church you are attending committed as an almost fanatical conviction to never be satisfied

with the status quo, to keep dragging the church up onto the top of the ski jump again with some folks kicking and screaming along the way; and with lots of people who say, “Can’t we just stay in the ski lodge this time and take off our boots and warm our toes by the fire and drink hot chocolate?”

Why keep sending great people off to start new churches? To reach unreached peoples around the world? To start new ministries and try to touch the lives of people that are different than us with all the corresponding upset and discomfort?

Well, let me ask you a more personal question. Why might God be calling you today to significantly disrupt your life and your comfort level? To make some big changes that put you and your family at risk? Why might God be saying, “I want you to get on the down escalator?” Why might all that God is doing in the church be something that he wants to speak to you directly?

I want to speak to what we are observing here in the church. I want to give it some context, to look at the transitions in peoples’ lives and in the life of this church through the lens of scripture. I’ve called today’s talk, “The Pearl of Great Price.”

Matthew 13:44-46

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Now there are a lot of similar elements in these stories about the treasure and the pearl. Both stories are about the kingdom of heaven. In verse 44 we read, “The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.” In verse 45, again, “The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.” When you read the phrase “kingdom of heaven” you should not translate it in your mind as the afterlife, although eternity with God is a part of the kingdom of heaven. By the kingdom of heaven, or what the other gospel writers other than Matthew call “the kingdom of God,” Jesus is talking about God’s rule over your life. The kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God – Jesus means the surrender of your agendas, your plans, your goals, your ideas about what makes life worth living, and the submission of your life to God’s agenda, God’s plans, God’s goals, and his idea of what makes life worth living for the present, for the future, so that you might experience more of God’s blessing and thereby be more of a blessing to others for the glory of God.

What is the kingdom? It is submitting yourself, body and soul, to God’s plan for your life, so that you might be blessed and you might be a blessing to others for God’s glory. It’s not “my will, but your will, God. Not my plans, but your plans.

Not my agenda, but your agenda, so that I might experience more of you, and, through me, that people might be blessed all for your glory.”

Both stories are about God’s kingdom. Both stories compare the kingdom of God to something of great value. In the one case, in verse 44, the kingdom is compared to a treasure. In the other case, in verse 46, the kingdom is compared to a pearl of very great value. And in both cases, the thing of great value is not obvious to everyone. The treasure was hidden in a field. It had to be dug up. The pearl was likely mingled with other pearls and had to be searched out – that is, the pearl had to be fought for.

In both cases, in the case of the treasure and the pearl, faith and action were required on the part of the man to acquire them. It wasn’t enough that the man found something of great value. He had to do something. He had to risk something. He had to believe something to get the treasure. And the merchant had to do the same; there had to be action and faith to acquire the pearl.

In both cases, the precious thing cost everything. In verse 44 we read, “In his joy he went and sold all that he had.” In verse 46, “when he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything.” The men in the stories had to sell all, they had to commit all, and they had to risk all to get the treasure, to acquire the pearl.

But in both cases there was no ultimate sacrifice. Verse 44 lays out what I think is implicit in the other story. We read this very important phrase, “in his joy.” Look at this: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again and then [you should underline this in your bibles] in his joy went out and sold all that he had and bought that field.” In his joy he sold everything. In his joy he committed all, risked all, and surrendered his life. Not sorrowfully, not reluctantly – it doesn’t say that he did so dutifully. In his joy, gladly, with a sense of great privilege, falling on his knees in gratitude to God, he gave up everything. Both stories are alike in that they communicate that there is no ultimate sacrifice with God, no ultimate loss.

The only difference I can see in these two stories is how these two people discovered the kingdom. In verse 44 the man appears to have just stumbled upon the treasure. It says, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in the field. When a man found it, he hid it again.” He just trips over the treasure in the field.

In the 1st century, when Jesus told these stories, there were no banks, or safes, or safety deposit boxes. The best place to keep valuables from being stolen by thieves or from burning up in a fire, or being captured in a war was to bury it in a farm field. I suspect that occasionally a person would die before informing his heirs that he had buried a treasure in a field somewhere.

In this particular case, it appears that the field was sold and Jesus is picturing a workman plowing the field of the new owner. As he is plowing the field, his plow hits something hard. "What's this? What's under the surface? Is it a rock? It doesn't feel like a rock." And so he digs and sees the top of a chest. And so he digs more furiously. He is digging with his hands. And there it is, buried in the ground, a treasure chest filled with gold and precious stones. This man stumbled over it; he bumped into it.

And in the other story the merchant is seeking. We read in verse 45, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls." He knows that there is one particular pearl out there. He's heard about it. There are tales coming from the Arabian Peninsula. Merchants are coming back from India. They are telling stories of this one pearl and this merchant decides that he must have it. So he travels from place to place and goes through bags and bags of pearls. He goes into all the market places looking for the one precious pearl.

I think there is one difference. It is the difference between stumbling over the kingdom, bumping into it unexpectedly, versus seeking, searching, and looking which communicates to us the basic truth that there simply is not one way or one simple formula for people to discover Christ and his great worth.

Some people are totally not looking for him. They are going entirely in another direction. They are like Paul in the Bible, on his way to persecute Christians when he bumps into the Jesus. They are like the woman at the well going out at noon to get some water, avoiding her neighbors, but she runs into Jesus. A person just bumps into one of Jesus' representatives.

You know the story, friend. You are dragged to the church by a family member, by a spouse, a coworker, or a friend. You aren't really all that interested. You are just trying to please this other person. And you suddenly, maybe during the worship or the message - you suddenly get this uncomfortable feeling. You have this horrible sense that, my God, this Jesus thing might actually be true. You just hit out of left field. You are not expecting it.

I've heard from many of you, who said you came here to Vineyard, someone dragged you here and you found yourself quite unexpectedly crying through one of the worship songs and you didn't know why. And it was like you were having an out of body experience. You were watching yourself and you say, "What's the matter with me? I don't believe this stuff. I'm not a religious person. I'm not a church person." But something in the depths of you, something that went beyond your background, your expectations, and your interests – you had an encounter with God.

That's definitely my story. I found Christ when I was not looking for him. Honestly, I was not at all conscious of any internal desire to surrender my life to God, to submit to God's agenda for my life, to turn myself over to God's will, or

God's plan. I cannot remember looking for God, or searching for God. But he found me. He ran me down. That's grace. That's God's kindness, God's favor to the utterly undeserving. And that's the story of a lot of you. Jesus just chased you down.

Well, right now, friend, let me interpret your present experience. Jesus is chasing you down. Everywhere you go there is just another reminder of Christ. Another Christian, another little sign from God pointing right at you saying to you, "I want you. Give your life to me. Turn your future over to me. Trust me. Come to me. Surrender everything to me."

On the other hand, there are lots of people who really are searching. There are many people like the merchant in this story who was searching for the pearl that he heard about. We read of the Bereans in Acts 17, who after hearing the apostle Paul preach ran home and dug into their bibles to find out whether what Paul was saying was actually what the Bible taught. They searched the scriptures to see if Paul's teaching was consistent with the Bible.

There are people like the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 who went on a pilgrimage to find God. He studied the scriptures. He asked questions. That man was a seeker.

So was Nicodemus in John 3, or Cornelius in Acts 10, or Lydia in Acts 16. Seekers, searchers, all of them.

I've encountered hundreds of seekers in my life. Many of you were like this. Many of you are like this. You say, "For me, I always, ever since I was a child - I just knew inside that there had to be a God, that there had to be something more, that there had to be something or someone worth giving my life to." You are like the merchant looking for the one valuable pearl. Maybe you read. Maybe you asked questions. You argued. You go to different churches. You watch different TV shows. You are interested in spiritual things. Some of you even checked out different religions. Maybe you got into New Age stuff. But inside, friends, you were searching. You were looking. You really wanted to find that one missing puzzle piece to your life.

There is not one way to connect with the kingdom of God. Sometimes you trip over it. You feel like you have just been run down and ran over. And sometimes you search and you look and you ask questions and you cry out and you pray.

Well, what is true in every case is that a person who discovers the kingdom whether by accident or intentionally, what is true is that when a person finds God's kingdom, there is a recognition, an internal recognition, that God's agenda, God's plan for your life, the opportunity to experience more of God's blessings and to be a blessing, in every case a person must see that the kingdom of God is of infinite, inestimable worth.

I read a story once about a break-in that occurred at an electronics store. It happened in the dead of night. The police showed up. The owner showed up. They went through the store. The owner looked around but didn't see anything missing. There didn't seem to be anything stolen. And so he locked up the store and went home. The police patrolled the area that night.

In the morning when shoppers came they were bringing to the cashier color TV sets for \$2.10 and DVD players for \$1.50. Other customers were ringing for a sales clerk and wondering why a pack of batteries cost \$900 and why a Walkman was selling for \$150.

What the thieves had done during the break-in was switch the price tags on everything. They just went around the store taking the prices on the large screen TVs and putting them on the batteries. And taking the battery price and putting it on the large screen TVs.

Do you know what life is all about? Do you know the secret to life? Life is all about you and me discovering the real worth of things. Getting behind the price tags that the world assigns to something and discovering the real worth. A great life, a good life, a life worth living is a life where the value you place on something corresponds to their real worth. And a wasted life is a life where the value and the energy you devote to something bear no relationship to the thing's real worth.

Do you get it?

Let me use a couple of simple illustrations. A wasted life is a life spent missing your children's childhoods because you are climbing the corporate ladder. A wasted life is a life spent screaming at your kids because they are messing up your clean house instead of building into them and investing in their lives so that they turn out to be productive, responsible and godly people. A wasted life is a life spent investing in your golf game rather than in your marriage, or pursuing career goals at the expense of relationships with people. You climb the ladder of success, as Stephen Covey put it in his *7 Habits of Highly Successful People*, only to discover that your ladder is leaning against the wrong wall.

See, Satan is always switching the price tags on things. That's what deception and temptation are all about. You undervalue what really matters, like sexual purity, like honesty in all things, including your resume and your taxes. You undervalue what really matters and you waste yourself on something that is totally trivial – detailing your car every weekend, trying to get your body to look absolutely perfect. Satan is always switching the price tags, friends. That's what deception and temptation are all about.

Let me put it in the context of my series on worship. Do you know where the word "worship" came from? It came from an old English word, "worthship."

Worship is all about you recognizing, in the deepest part of your being, the surpassing worth of Christ and his kingdom. That you are able to get past the price tag that the world puts on Christ and the price tag that the world puts on his kingdom and you recognize the real worth.

Let me use a different illustration. You know what it's like living in this world? It is like you driving down the road on a rainy day trying to see ahead, trying to see clearly, and your worst enemy in the world drives by in a huge 18-wheeler and deliberately kicks up a whole bunch of mud on your windshield. You can't see. You can't make things out. Unless you use your windshield wipers and some washer fluid to clear away the mud, what acts as a windshield wiper for you is God's Word. Forget what price tags the world assigns to things. Clear away the mud and look at God's Word.

Do you know what God's Word says? God's Word says, in Colossians 2:2, "that you might know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hid all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." If you are looking for understanding, if you are looking for counsel for your future, go to Christ.

God's Word says that Christ is rich in mercy, and rich in kindness. Well, how about Ephesians 1:7, "In him [Christ], we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding."

Or how about Ephesians 1:18, "I pray that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened." That the windshield wipers would work properly. That the mud would clear off your windshield. A fog would lift in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, his incomparably great power for us who believe.

The Bible says over and over again that if you are looking for something or someone worth giving your life to, there is no one and nothing of greater worth than Christ. There is nothing that will make for a better life for you and for others around you than selling out everything to find Christ and to submit to his will, his plan, and his agenda for you.

See, that's what worship is all about. When we sing worship songs, they assist us to focus upon the worth of Christ. That's what communion is all about. Communion helps us; it assists us to focus upon the worth of Christ. The arts, architecture, and dance – they are aids to help us in what real worship is. It's more than church-going. It's more than singing. I've been saying throughout this series that worship is a lifestyle. And right here I'm telling you that worship is a lifestyle of assigning the appropriate worth to things.

Worship is the continual habit of checking the price tag and saying to yourself, "Is this right? I know everyone says that security or safety or having this shape of

body, or this kind of house, or this kind of hair is the most valuable thing in life, but is it really? God, what do you say? What do you consider valuable? What's your agenda?" And having found what God says, you submit yourself to it. That's worship.

Now, listen, friends. The worth of the treasure, the worth of the pearl is not obvious to everyone in the world. It says in verse 44 that the treasure was hidden in the fields. I suspect that the pearl, likewise, was tossed into a bag with hundreds of other pearls. The person who tossed it in the bag had no idea of its value. They were like the people selling some priceless work of art at a flea market.

Do not expect that everyone in the world will support your decision to trade in what they regard as precious as you submit your life to God's agenda and God's plan for you.

Not too long ago I had a long distance phone call from a distraught father of one of our missionaries. He was concerned that his son, who I'll call Bruce, was throwing away a successful career in order to traipse halfway around the world doing God knows what, trying to convert people. He said, "Why, Rich? What's the point? It's unsafe there. It's dirty. They don't speak English. I won't get to see my grandchildren."

I tried to be as kind as I could be to him. I empathized with his concerns for his son and I empathized with his concern for his grandchildren's safety, and how difficult it would be to not see your grandchildren or your son or your daughter-in-law.

And then he said, "Why is the church doing this to Bruce? I know he respects you, Rich. Please tell him to stay home."

And I said, "Jim, with all due respect, the church is not doing anything to your son. I've known your son for 20 years and he doesn't do anything that he doesn't choose to do. This is Bruce's decision, not the decision of the church. And, Jim, again with all due respect, isn't it clear to you by now that Bruce sees life differently than you do? That he is going after what is most precious to him? He's paying attention to his family. He's not being foolish with his children's safety. He's committed to their love and their protection and their care. But he is going after what is most precious to him – seeing people come to know Christ. That's what he values. Helping people to discover faith is what he is passionate about."

Let me ask you a question. Are the decisions you have made about the way you conduct your life obvious and acceptable to everyone around you? Do people say about you, "Yes, she's religious. Yes, she's into her church."? But basically all of your life choices make sense to everyone in the world.

May I be personal for a moment? Do you, friend, find yourself in this story? Exactly when in your life did you really sell all to get the kingdom? When did you do it? I believe if no one in the world ever shakes their head in puzzlement about you, if no one ever says, "What a waste. O, how stupid, how foolish!" it is unlikely that you are living in full submission to God's agenda for your life.

See, the Bible says that God's thoughts are not the thoughts of men. That God's ways are not the ways of this world. Exactly where, exactly at what point does someone say about you, "You are crazy."? Maybe in your case, it is not a career change. Maybe it is staying in a bad marriage because you are submitted to God's Word and you are committed to keeping your vows regardless of what everyone else says, "You are sick – get out of it. It's not worth it." The price tag on your marriage is \$1.50 and you are investing hundreds of thousands.

Or maybe for you it is refraining from sex before marriage, when everyone including your own body is screaming for you to give in. Why value chastity? It's not worth anything. Give in. Give up.

Now this is where faith comes in. When you are standing at the edge of the ski jump and everyone around you screams, "Don't push off. Don't be a fool. Take off your skis. Go back to the lodge and have a cup of cocoa." Faith is letting go of the present obvious security. Faith is giving up this moment's pleasure for the bare promise that there is a more satisfying, more blessed, more wonderful future a millisecond from now, or ten years from now that you can't quite see. Faith says, "If I push off, if I reach out for a future that is just beyond my grasp, God will place it in my hands." Faith says, "If I submit to God's agenda, even though it risks my current security, I'm going to be blessed more and I'm going to be more of a blessing."

See, there's more of Jesus for you, friend. There's more of his power that you haven't experienced. There's more of his presence. And faith says, "I'm going to go for it."

Listen, it is not enough to see the worth of God's kingdom, to nod your head and say, "Yeah, I totally agree. Life lived in submission to God's agenda is really the only worthwhile life." And you nod your head, "more of Christ, more of his kingdom that's what matters. That's what really counts." The men in these stories took action. They did something about what they knew. They went out and bought the field. They purchased the pearl. Faith is more than perceiving value. It is more than agreeing. Faith does something.

Some people love the search. I heard a Harvard professor, who is the author of a number of books of history, on the Bill Moyer show talking about how life is all about searching. But it is never about arriving. In other words, it is always about looking for the pearl, but never about finding it. I was reminded of the writer G.K.

Chesterton's line when he was debating with an agnostic. The agnostic said, "I open my mind to truth the way a flower opens to the sun. Opening, ever opening." Chesterton said, "I open my mind to truth the way a man opens his mouth for food, so I can bite down on something solid again."

Let me ask you something, friend. What are you doing with the truth you already know? Do you claim that you value the worth of God's agenda? You claim that you value God's blessing on you. You say that there is nothing more important than God's blessing on your family. That's not faith.

I'll tell you what faith is. When Craig Heselton left his job a number of people said to him, "I know what you are doing is right. I wish I had your courage. I wish I could make your choice."

Bob Buford wrote a whole book titled Halftime in which he described a shift that takes place in men's lives in middle age. He said, "You know, men spend the first half of their lives searching for success. By age 45 they either have it or they don't have it. But the second half of their life is a search for significance – trying to leave behind something of lasting value, something that makes a difference."

The men around Craig said, "Yes, we agree. We are looking for significance. We want to make a lasting impact with our lives. We want to do what we believe makes a difference." But they weren't willing to risk. Unlike Craig, these men will never take any action. They are too afraid of letting go of success to gain significance.

I'm sure there is some aspect of God's kingdom, God's agenda, for your life that you are aware of. You see it. You see the value of it. The question is, "What are you going to do about it?" You say, "I'm too afraid to let go of present pleasure" or "I'm just going to take a deep breath and make that one big step."

You know, people who go to hell are people who always pass by the treasure. They see it. They perceive the value of the kingdom, but they never take any action.

There's a price tag on experiencing more of God's pleasure, bringing your life more fully under God's agenda and God's will. Verse 44 says that the man sold all that he had and bought that field. Verse 46 says that when the merchant found one of great value he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. The men in these two stories sold everything.

C.S. Lewis, in his classic book titled *Mere Christianity*, asked the question: "How much of myself must I give to gain Christ, to gain the kingdom?" And he says:

"Here's the difference between being a Christian and merely being moral. You start with yourself – your desires, your interests, your agenda - and

then you see that there are these claims, these moral claims out there for the good of society that interfere with your desires. There are things that you ought to do that are wrong and you give in to the claims of morality and you say, 'Well, I'm not going to do those things.' And there are other things that we call right and we will do those things. But all the time, inside, is your poor natural self that wants to do what it likes. Like the person who pays taxes, 'okay, I'll give my tax; I'll pay my tribute to morality.'"

You know what happens to the person who is merely aiming at being moral? Your natural self gets starved and after awhile you become a really angry person. You either give up and say, "Just forget it. I can't be moral. It's not working," Or you are always discontented, always grumbling, always feeling put upon. "I'm sick and tired of always doing what's right."

C.S. Lewis says that Christ approaches us very differently. Christ says not, "Give me a piece of yourself," he says, "Give me all. I just don't want so much of your time, this percent of your money, I want you. I've not come to limit your natural self. I've come to cure it. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there. I'm going to cut the whole tree down. Hand over your whole natural self."

See, friends, you can't get the kingdom unless you turn your whole self over. You can't hold onto yourself and also gain the kingdom. It can't be done. He says that if you are a field that contains nothing but grass seed, you are not ever going to produce wheat. You can keep cutting the grass and make it short. But you still will only produce grass and never any wheat. If you want to produce wheat, the whole field has to be plowed up and reseeded. The change has to happen below the surface.

Whatever is getting in the way of you surrendering to God's agenda, that thing has to be given up. If it is a relationship with a guy or girl, Jesus would say, "Break it off. It's not worth it to keep yourself from the kingdom." If it's TV, pull the plug. It is not worth it to keep yourself from the kingdom. If it's a job, if its security, if it's success, if it's your parents' approval – it's not worth it. Jesus says, "Give me all, all of you. You are never going to be happy with partial measures."

The reason why many of you are miserable and unhappy Christians is because you are giving God a percentage. You are trying to be good and to meet your own desires. It never works.

But when you turn your life over, when you see the value of the kingdom, you take action, you push off, you let go of this present security so that you can gain more of Christ. Friend, there is never any ultimate sacrifice. Here's what Jesus says in verse 44: "When the man found it, he hid it again and in his joy went and sold all that he had." Nobody who encounters the kingdom of God, nobody who

really surrenders to God's agenda, ever comes away saying anything other than "it was totally worth it."

16 years ago I heard a message on the pearl of great price delivered by the founder of the Vineyard movement, John Wimber. That message on the pearl of great price radically changed my life. I had been praying about whether God was calling me to leave my career at OSU where I was teaching business law and begin to pastor what was then the little church called Christ Community Church. It was a church of about 150 people. And I felt that evening that God was offering me the kingdom. He was showing me the pearl. He is letting me in on the treasure in the field.

And so I decided in my heart to push off. My salary was immediately cut in half. I gave up a lucrative book contract. I was a year away from gaining tenure – permanent job security, great benefits. I put my law license in the drawer. I don't tell you anything of this to boast. But the thing is, in the 16 years since I decided to push off, I have never ever felt anything other than extreme gratitude that I have the privilege of experiencing the kingdom of God and following Jesus Christ.

Anyone who sells out, who really submits, who really surrenders is going to ultimately experience what I experienced – no ultimate sacrifice – just an internal feeling of continual gratitude that says, "Lord, I can't believe it. I can't believe that I get to enjoy the kingdom of God here."

That's what Danny and Penny are going to feel. That's what Craig and Linda are going to feel. That's what our church is going to feel. It is not heroism. We are just people who have decided to give our lives to the things that really matter, to what is most significant, to what's of ultimate worth. And the person who does that will never be disappointed. Let's pray.

The Pearl of Great Price

Rich Nathan

March 16-17, 2002

Worship: Worship as a Lifestyle Series

Matthew 13:44-46

I. The Discovery of the Kingdom

II. The Experience of the Kingdom

A. Great Value

B. Not Obvious

C. Faith Required

D. Action Needed

E. All Surrendered

F. Pure Joy