

The Treasure

MOVEMENT ONE – THE QUESTION

Two of the shortest stories Jesus told sit side by side in Matthew 13, and they are almost the same story.

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.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Four lines. A man finds something, sells everything, and buys.

The usual reading is straightforward, and I have preached it. You are the man in the field. You are the merchant. The kingdom is worth more than everything you own put together, and anyone who actually sees that will hand over whatever it costs and do it gladly. That reading is in the text. These parables sit in a run of parables about the kingdom, and the man in the story is plainly someone making a decision.

What it does not ask is what Jesus himself counted worth everything. And on that we are not left to infer, because there is a passage where he says it out loud.

On the last night, praying where the disciples could hear him, he asked for one thing.

And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

Then, in the same prayer, he gave it away.

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one.

And then he asked for company in it.

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me.

Glory. Asked for, handed over, and shared – three times in one prayer, on the last night, with everything else stripped away.

Once you have heard that, a story about a man who sells everything he owns stops sounding like advice.

But I am not getting this from Matthew. Twice in this chapter Jesus explains one of his own parables, and both times the person in the story is the one listening (13:18–23, 13:37–43). Read the treasure and the pearl the same way and the buyer is you.

I am reading the parable backwards, from John 17. He told us in his own words what he counted worth everything, and once you know that, you cannot un-hear it in a story about a man who sells all he has and buys a field.

It is a second reading, not the first one, and it doesn't cancel the first.

MOVEMENT TWO – WHAT THE PARABLES ACTUALLY SAY

They are not quite the same story, and the difference is what gets bought.

| *He goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

Not the treasure. The field. The treasure is already in the ground – what costs him everything is the dirt around it.

And nine verses earlier, in the same chapter, Jesus has already said what a field is. Explaining the weeds, he tells them plainly: *the field is the world*.

That is a different parable, so I am borrowing it. But it is his own word for his own image, in the same chapter, in the same sitting. Put it in and read the sentence again. He sells all that he has and buys the world, in order to have what is hidden in it.

Hidden is the word Matthew chooses. Not treasure locked away, or treasure carried off to somewhere difficult. *Treasure hidden in a field* – buried in ordinary ground, walked over every day by people who own the paddock and don't know.

It is also his word for what he is doing. Nine verses before the treasure, explaining why Jesus teaches in parables at all, Matthew reaches for the psalm: *I will utter what has been hidden*. Same verb, same tense, same participle. The parables are not pictures laid over a plain teaching. They are the ground it is buried in.

And the man does it a third time. He finds the treasure and covers it up – the same verb again, with him as the subject now. He does not dig it out and run. He hides it, buys the paddock, and owns the hiding place.

The second man is a merchant *in search of* fine pearls: a man in the trade, who knows what pearls are worth before he ever sees this one. He doesn't stumble on anything. He is the only person in the market who can price what he is looking at.

Then there is the detail that is easiest to walk past.

In his joy he goes and sells all that he has.

The writer to the Hebrews reaches for the same word for the same reason. *Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.*

It isn't the word by itself – joy is common enough. It is the shape: joy named as the reason a man accepts total loss. That shape turns up twice, and the second time it is about the cross.

If he is the buyer, someone will ask who is selling. It's a fair question with a bad old answer behind it, and the way out is that the New Testament's purchase language names a price, not a counterparty. When Revelation says the Lamb purchased people by his blood, it names no seller either.

Which leaves the thing itself. If he is the merchant, what is the pearl?

Glory. But not the glory he already had – he had that before the world existed, and no man sells everything to buy what is already his.

What he did not have was glory with us in it. That is the one thing the prayer asks for that he does not already possess. *The glory that you have given me I have given to them. That they may be with me where I am.* Glory shared. Glory with faces in it. That is the pearl of surpassing value, and it is the only thing in the universe he had to pay for.

One caution, because a parable is a picture and not a doctrine of the atonement. Wherever the New Testament states the transaction plainly, the thing purchased is people – *by your blood you ransomed people for God, the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood, you were bought with a price.* Never glory. Glory is what he is given, what he enters, what he is crowned with. So the sentence that will not hold is *Christ purchased glory*. The sentence that holds is that he bought a people, and glory is what they were always for.

Which is what the parable says, told as a story rather than a doctrine. The pearl is what he was after. Buying us is how he got it.

And the treasure in the paddock is the same thing – glory, buried in the world, hidden in ordinary people who have no idea it is in them. Which is exactly why it is in a field and not a vault.

There is one word in all this that won't hold, and it is *back*.

I have been saying he bought it back. But he never lost it. Whatever the incarnation cost him, it did not cost him his own nature – it couldn't have. If he had actually stopped being God there would have been nobody left who could do the buying.

And the New Testament never speaks as though he went back. Its habitual word, wherever glory and people meet, is *into* – *eis*.

In bringing many sons to glory.

Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?

The God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ.

Father, I desire that they also may be with me where I am.

Nobody in the New Testament goes back to glory. They go in.

What he did not have was glory with us in it.

Which raises the thing that most needs care. If he already had it and never lost it, and if what he wanted was to bring us inside it, then something is being added – and nothing can be added to God. He was not short of anything before the world existed. A God who needed us in order to be fully glorious would not be much of a God, and the Father and the Son were not sitting in a deficient eternity waiting for company.

So nothing is added to God. What is new is on our side. The one glory, entire and undiminished, now has a shared form it did not have before – reflected, participated in, worn by creatures made out of dirt. A hall of mirrors multiplies the image without adding anything to the light.

Paul says as much, in the same chapter I had opened that morning.

For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

That sits between the clay pot and the weight. Read the chapter straight through and the order is: treasure in a cracked container, afflicted but not crushed, grace reaching more and more and increasing, the outer self wasting while the inner is renewed, and then the light affliction and the eternal weight of glory. The multiplying is Paul's, not mine.

There is one place where *back* is the right word.

For the rest of us the longing for glory is not a memory. Lewis's whole argument turns on that: what we want is something that has never once appeared in our experience, and every attempt to locate it in our own past is a cheat. We ache for a country we have never visited.

Jesus is the exception. He is the only one who has been there. *The glory that I had with you before the world existed* is not a hope. It is a recollection.

So he is the one person who could legitimately have gone back. And he didn't. He went in, and took us with him. He left alone; he returned with a body, with scars, and with brothers.

MOVEMENT FOUR – WHAT GLORY IS

I have used the word all the way through without once saying what it means.

The Hebrew is *kavod*, and its root means heavy. Weight. Mass. When the glory fills the tabernacle the priests cannot stand up in it; it is not a mood, it is a load.

Its opposite is *hevel*. Vapour. Breath on a cold morning. The word Ecclesiastes uses thirty-eight times for everything that doesn't last, and the name given to the first man who died.¹

Which gives a definition plain enough to carry: **glory is what is still there when everything else evaporates.**

And the Hebrew does something else worth having. The verb from the same root, *kabed*, means to make heavy – and it is the word in *honour your father and mother*. To honour is to give weight to. So when Scripture tells us to glorify God it is not asking us to make him heavier. It is asking us to stop pretending he weighs less than he does.

You become the weight of what you value.

The Greek came at it from the other end. *Doxa* originally meant opinion – from *dokeō*, to seem. What people reckon of you. Reputation. Then the translators of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek conscripted that word to carry *kavod*, and a word meaning *how you are regarded* was made to mean *what God substantially is*.

Which is why Lewis's definition is less odd than it first looks. He says glory means *good report with God, acceptance by God, response, acknowledgment, and welcome into the heart of things*. He is reaching back to the oldest sense of *doxa* and turning it the right way round. Not our opinion of God. God's report of us – and that report, unlike every other opinion ever formed about you, has weight.

Glory is not what every passage of Scripture is about. Plenty of it is about boundary disputes and grain offerings and who begat whom.

But glory is what is at stake in the story. It is what is lost in Genesis 3, what fills the tent at the end of Exodus, what lifts off the temple and leaves in Ezekiel, what walks back into the world in John 1, what he asks for on the last night, and what we are finally brought into. That is a spine. It holds without having to explain everything.

And if that is what glory is, then the old catechism answer is not two things but one. *Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.* The conjunction is the argument. We were built to give weight to the only thing that has any, and doing what you were built for is the most satisfying thing available to a human being.

Jonathan Edwards said it in one sentence: *God is glorified not only by his glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in.*² Seeing it is half. The enjoying is the rest.

Eric Liddell's line in the film has it exactly: *I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure.*³

MOVEMENT FIVE – THE EXCHANGE

There is a word for what went wrong, and it is a trading word.

They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images. Romans 1:23. Paul is not inventing the charge; he is quoting his own scriptures back at us. *They exchanged their glory for the image of an ox that eats grass* – Psalm 106. *My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit* – Jeremiah 2:11.

Three texts, one transaction. And in Jeremiah it is spelled out in the two words we now have. Six verses before he says they changed their *kavod*, he says this: *they went after hevel, and became hevel.* They chased vapour and turned into it.

You become the weight of what you value. That is the whole diagnosis in six words, and it is six hundred years older than Paul.

Two verses further on Jeremiah gives the picture: *they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.* A cracked pit of stagnant water instead of a spring. It is the same complaint Lewis makes about us, in Hebrew, in the seventh century BC.

The same trade was offered to him.

On the mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world *and their glory* – and the word Matthew uses is *doxa*. Luke is blunter still: *to you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.*

There is a second merchant in this story. He is offering glory too – no field to buy, no cross, available immediately, at a discount. And the offer was made to the one man in history who had worn the real thing and knew exactly what it weighed.

We ache for a country we have never visited.

Lewis says we are *far too easily pleased* – like a child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. Jesus is the single counter-instance. He had seen the sea. No mud pie ever got near him.

He refused the exchange. Then he went and made the opposite one, and sold everything he had.

And one man, on a road to Damascus, ran his own Romans 1 in reverse. *Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.* Paul writes the diagnosis in Romans and the cure in Philippians, and both of them are ledgers.

CODA

Glory is never hidden by distance. It is hidden by ordinariness, which is a far better hiding place – buried in a paddock, carried around in the cheapest container in the house, and walking about in people you would not look at twice.

Lewis ends his sermon on that, and his last words are the right ones to finish with. Your neighbour, he says, is the holiest object presented to your senses – for in him also *Christ vere latitat*: the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden.

¹ The pairing of *kavod* against *hevel* is a frame I have found useful, not a formal word-pair in the Hebrew Bible. Ecclesiastes runs *hevel* through thirty-eight verses and never sets *kavod* against it. Jeremiah 2 is the closest the text itself comes to putting them in the same indictment.

² Jonathan Edwards, *The "Miscellanies"*, no. 448, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, ed. Thomas A. Schafer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 495. Edwards makes the same argument at length in *The End for Which God Created the World*.

³ The line is from the 1981 screenplay of *Chariots of Fire*, written by Colin Welland. It is quoted almost everywhere as though Liddell said it; there is no record that he did.

This article did not begin with artificial intelligence. It began with years of ministry, reading, prayer, suffering, and conversation.

During the development of this article, AI became a conversation partner. It challenged assumptions, tested arguments, suggested structures, and helped refine expression. Many of the words that follow emerged through that dialogue.

The experiences, convictions, interpretations, and conclusions remain my own.