

Heaven and how to Find it

Matthew 13: 44-52

#5 in our series “Stories Jesus Told”

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Prayer

Lord God, we thank you that you make beautiful things out of the dust, and that is definitely something that you have been showing us as we preach our way through Matthew chapter thirteen and those stories that Jesus told. So Lord God, would you help us to preach, and would you make beautiful things out of the dust? In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Message

Clip about Heaven is shown:

[Fred Astaire is singing as he dances with a lady as a big band plays]

Heaven, I’m in Heaven,
And my heart beats so that I can hardly speak,
And I seem to find the happiness I seek
When we’re out together dancing cheek to cheek.

What is Heaven? Throw out words – descriptions.

[The congregation responds: Bliss! Coffee! Paradise. Safety. Etc.]

In the Revelation it’s like this amazing city where everything is

Valuable – streets of gold, walls made of jewels

Beautiful – good

Nourishing and satisfying like a feast.

It is what makes us truly happy and “I seem to find the happiness I seek.”

Where do we find it?

In Matthew 6: 33 Jesus says, “*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...*”

But He doesn’t tell us *how* to seek the Kingdom or *where* to find the Kingdom of God, that is, the Kingdom of Heaven.

So, How do you seek heaven and where do you find it?

Maybe a Bible study

Maybe seminary

Maybe by gaining some knowledge

Maybe by going on a pilgrimage

In the Old Testament, the Promised Land is like the “*Kingdom of Heaven.*” The Israelites receive the law and then take a pilgrimage. They travel through the wilderness to find “*the kingdom,*” but they all die in the wilderness not having found it (all except for Joshua and Caleb, which means dog).

How do you find the “*Kingdom of Heaven?*” It’s a rather strange question when you realize that heaven basically means “*sky.*” So how do you find “he “*sky*”–when you’re made of dirt and

destined for dirt – when you're buried in dirt, pain and chaos? If you're like me, you sometimes think, "It would be easiest to just stop looking."

Well, in Matthew 13, Jesus starts telling stories about heaven.

In Matthew 13: 31, Jesus says, "*the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed.*" In verse 33, He says, "*The kingdom of heaven is like leaven.*" In verse 37, He expands on the fact that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed. Jesus tells them three stories in a pattern, (- what we looked at last time.) And now, in verse 44, He tells three more stories in the same pattern.

Story one: Matthew 13: 44

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure (thesaurus) 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.

Story two: verse 45

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.

Story three: Matthew 13: 46 - 50

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net a drag net¹ that was thrown into the sea and gathered stuff ("fish" – supplied by translator) of every kind (genos – "genus"). When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

We think that, to find heaven on earth, one must achieve greatness in some way. One must be outstanding in some field . . . and the man in the first story is literally out standing in a field or walking in a field, or maybe he was plowing in the field in order to "*eat bread by the sweat of his brow,*" like Adam, in Genesis 3: 9. And all of a sudden, "clunk!" The plow hits a box and he finds treasure. Well, who buried this treasure? If it was the owner of the field, why would that owner sell the field—unless, of course, he wanted this man to find the treasure.

Proverbs 25: 2

It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings to find them out.²

¹ "Sunago" – to gather, a gathering is a *sunagoge* (a synagogue).

² Many historians have argued that modern science is a product of Western civilization and this belief that the glory of God is to hide meaning in His creation and the glory of man to seek it out.

The Greek word translated treasure is *thesaurus* where we get our word thesaurus, a treasury of meaning.

I think that is why I love geology; my undergrad degree, it's meaning hidden in the dirt. I used to love to take my kids hunting for fossils next to c-470 we'd find treasure fossilized clams from the upper cretaceous—a treasury of meaning buried in dirt.

You remember that God breathed His Spirit into dirt, and man became a living being. *"We have this treasure in earthen vessels,"* writes Paul. In the stone sanctuary, there was a treasury. *"We have this treasure in earthen vessels,"* writes Paul. Well, the man in the story bought this piece of earth, but there's no way he could afford the treasure. You can't begin to pay for heaven, but y'all can afford a little dirt.

In 258 A.D., having just martyred the Bishop of Rome, the Emperor Valerian demanded that the chief deacon of the church in Rome hand over all the church's treasure. On the third day, that deacon presented to the Emperor, on the steps of his palace, the church's treasure: thousands of lepers; orphans; widows; the blind, lame, sick and old. "Here" he cried, "Here is the church's treasure, for the church is truly rich, far richer than the Emperor." That deacon's name was "Lawrence" now known as "St. Lawrence," for with that statement, he was martyred.

Finding the Kingdom cannot only get you dirty; it can also hurt.³

The next story Jesus tells is about a pearl. In Jesus' day, pearls were the most beautiful of all treasure, and yet they are found in the last place you'd expect...in an oyster (to the Jews – unclean), an oyster – in the mud, on the bottom of a shallow sea –Not just a dirty place, but a painful place.

A pearl forms around a wound in the body of an oyster, so an oyster first experiences a pearl as pain. It begins as an irritation: It begins as a rough piece of sand lodged in the flesh of an oyster. It must feel like a piece of broken glass in your head all the time – Do you understand?⁴

Perhaps all your irritations are the beginning of a pearl. In the fifth century B.C., the Greek poet, Aeschylus, wrote, "In our sleep, pain that cannot forget, drop by drop upon the heart and in our own despair, against our will comes wisdom through the awful grace of God." What a quote. But think about it. Think about the most wise and most beautiful people you know, . . . Aren't they those people that have suffered the most pain, yet come to accept the pain with grace? And now they are a pearl.

In Revelation 21 John sees twelve gates, into the New Jerusalem, that are twelve pearls, that are the twelve apostles, that symbolize you—the church. People enter *"the kingdom of heaven"* through your testimony of God's grace – God's grace wrapped around the pain of your sin and sins committed against you. It's that beauty that makes them pay attention to your testimony.

Now you may think, "Peter, you don't understand. It's not just dirt and it's not just pain, it's hell, absolute chaos."

³ Jesus has already told us that the Kingdom is like a seed and the seed must die – buried in dirt, it must die to live and that must hurt.

⁴ At the end of his life, Renoir had arthritis so bad that they had to tape the brush to his hand. People would say, "You're rich, - why are you still doing this?" And he would respond, "Pain lasts a moment, beauty lasts a lifetime."

Maybe beauty is eternal – a treasure that abides. I mean, faith, hope, and love seem to grow in some pretty dirty and painful places. And the most beautiful people are often those that have most suffered.

M. Scott Peck writes, "There is no way that we can live a rich life unless we are willing to suffer repeatedly, experiencing depression and despair, fear and anxiety, grief and sadness, anger and the agony of forgiving." And you know it is true that grace is revealed where something needs to be forgiven.

Well, in the third story, Jesus says, “*the kingdom of heaven is like a drag net*” (sag-ay-nay). It would be dropped into the depths of the sea and the sea, for the Jew, was a picture of death and hell, that is *Hades*. In Revelation 20:13, at the “close of the age” death, hell and the sea give up the dead that are in them and they are judged (*krino/krisis*) – that means “to separate.”

[Image of a halibut]

This is a halibut. The weirdest, ugliest fish in the depths of the sea and the best tasting in all the sea. A couple years ago, my friend, Walt, took me halibut fishing in Alaska. It was actually painful and a lot of work, so you might wonder why we did it . . . Well, we did it, just for the halibut . . . (seriously). I mean we caught a lot of stuff.

But, we really only wanted the halibut (that ‘genus,’ that species). If we could’ve, we might’ve used a net, and the net would’ve drug up all kinds of stuff: stuff the Jews considered clean – like halibut, and unclean–like oysters, clams or shellfish. It might’ve even drug up trash like old cans and tires.

Well, we sorted the halibut from the trash and we had a feast, a “hell-of-a” halibut feast. Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven is like that. It’s found in dirt, pain and chaos.” Maybe it’s found in another’s dirt, pain, and chaos. Maybe it’s found in your own dirt, pain and chaos. But it is a bit ironic, - isn’t it: dirt, pain, and chaos?

In my experience, folks turn to religion looking for the “Kingdom of Heaven” when in reality, they may be running from “the Kingdom of Heaven.” We read books, develop systems, rules, and boundaries to gain control. We go to Bible studies, churches, and seminaries to escape from our dirt, pain, and chaos and the Kingdom of God is hidden in dirt, pain and chaos. No wonder little children, tax collectors, and sinners find it when the scribes and Pharisees do not.

Well...

Why is it hidden?

Why do we have to look?

Why doesn’t God just hand it to us and say, “Here you go?”

At this point in the sermon I’d like us to pause, for it’s come to my attention that some people have not been paying attention to the message. So this is an exercise to help you pay attention: under one or two of the seats in this room, taped to the bottom of a chair, is the greatest candy bar ever made: a Baby Ruth Bar! Maybe you ought to look . . . [The congregants begins to find Baby Ruth bars throughout the sanctuary.]

Do you like Baby Ruth bars? Well, whether you do or don’t, you like them more now than you did – don’t you? Isn’t that interesting? You could afford to go buy a Baby Ruth bar, but because you sought it and found it, it’s more valuable.

The best Easter that I’ve ever had was fifteen years ago in the spring of 2000. My kids were 11, 10, 8 and 5. Because I was on sabbatical, I didn’t have to preach, so instead, I arranged an elaborate Easter egg hunt, like a scavenger hunt. I had a blast placing clues throughout the house and all around the neighborhood. It wasn’t a competition. I took into account the fact that Coleman was five and John was eleven. They had to work together and each was important. The hunt ended where we had hidden their Easter baskets—in the last place you’d expect to find a treasure trove of candy—in the back yard surrounded by dirt and stink—in the dog house.

When they found the treasure, they could hardly contain themselves. You see? The treasure was so much more valuable, beautiful, and satisfying because I didn't just hand them a basket of candy and say, "Here you go." I made them seek. They found the treasure, and I found their hearts as they each exclaimed, "Thank you, daddy, this is the best Easter I've ever had!" And that was the best Easter I've ever had.

Well anyway, we were asking why is the Kingdom hidden? And why would the Father hide his Kingdom in dirt, pain, and chaos? And why would Jesus hide His meaning in these confusing parables? Have you ever played Hide-and-Seek? I loved that game. We all used to play it after dark in the summers in the late 60's on South Prince Circle in Littleton. It was a thrill to seek and to find . . . even better was to hide and be found. You could be the chubby, uncoordinated kid, but, for a few glorious minutes, you were the most valuable kid on the block—the one everyone wanted to find.

You see? The hiding and the seeking increased your value like the Easter basket in the doghouse on Easter morning, like the Baby Ruth bar taped beneath your seat. Hide and Seek created desire. So Jesus says, "*Seek first the kingdom*" in Matthew 6: 33. Then, "*Seek and you will find*" in Matthew 7: 7. Then in Matthew 13: "*The kingdom is like a mustard seed*," it's like leaven; it's like wheat among tares. The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure buried in a field, like a merchant seeking fine pearls, like a net dropped into the sea.

Next verse, Matthew 13: 51, Jesus says to them: "*Have you understood all these things?*" They said to him, "Yes." I love that! The disciples were complete morons, and that gives me hope.

"*Do you understand all these things?*" What things? The Kingdom of Heaven, how it works in this world, and the Judgment of God. "*Do you understand these things?*" The Kingdom of God and His righteousness? "*Do you understand?*" And they say "*Yep.*" No more questions. "*Yep, we got it!*" What's wrong with them? They're not seeking.

One day, Rabbi Barukh's grandson Yehiel was playing Hide-and-Seek with another boy. He hid himself well and waited for his playmate to find him. After twenty minutes, he peeked out of his secret hiding place, saw no one, and pulled his head back inside. After waiting a very long time, he came out of his hiding place, but the other boy was nowhere to be seen. Then Yehiel realized that his playmate had not looked for him from the very beginning. Crying, he ran to his grandfather and complained of his faithless friend. Tears brimmed in Rabbi Barukh's eyes as he realized: God says the same thing: "*I hide but no one wants to seek me.*"

Maybe the problem isn't finding the Kingdom.
Maybe the problem is that we just don't want to look.

The Jesuit priest, Anthony De Mello, used to tell of a spiritual master so great, that God once sought his advice. He said: "I want to play a game of Hide-and-Seek with humankind. I've asked my angels what the best place is to hide in. Some say the depth of the ocean. Others the top of the highest mountain . . . What do you suggest?" The master replied, "Hide in the human heart. That's the last place they will think to look."

Well maybe the problem is not that we "don't think to look . . ."

Maybe we don't want to look . . .

Maybe we're afraid to look . . .

Have you ever been afraid to look at the dirt, pain, and chaos in your own heart?

In Romans 3, Paul quotes Isaiah (whom Jesus has also been quoting) Romans 3: 10 – 11

As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God."

"No one seeks." Why? Well, maybe we're afraid . . . Maybe the disciples are afraid . . . Jesus just said that thing about unrighteousness, and the fiery furnace, and the disciples feel a bit unrighteous. If I said, "The judgment of God—the righteousness of God is taped to the bottom of your seat," would you look?

So Jesus asks, "*Do you understand?*" And they say, "Yes" in terror. They want to change the subject. It's like when we say to people: "Seek to believe that God loves you and forgives you, or God will hate you and never ever forgive you, but forever torture you in a furnace of fire." People say, "Yep, I believe and now let's change the subject." Maybe they don't seek because they don't understand, because they're not righteous, but terrified of righteousness; that is the judgment of God.

In Romans 3: 4. Paul reveals that every man is a liar in order that all might see that God's Judgment is just and right. See Psalm 51:4. Then he asks "*If our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, is God unrighteous to inflict his wrath on us?*" He answers, "*Of course not, for then how could God judge the world?*" See? He talks as if all creation and all things have happened to reveal God's Judgment (God's eternal, foundational, unchanging Judgment is the reason for all things, the *Logos*—Logic of all things, and that Judgment is GLORIOUS! And that's what's so fascinating about these three stories. They're told in parallel with a freaky, weird thing that happens in the third story. It's what Jesus does in Luke 15.

1. There's a lost coin – it's found and there's a party.
2. There's a lost sheep – it's found and there's a party.
3. There's a lost boy – he's found and there's a party, but also a separation – someone doesn't want to go to the party!⁵

Jesus just used the same pattern in Matthew 13 (in the verses we read last time).

1. The Kingdom is like a mustard seed that grows and provides refuge.
2. The Kingdom is like leaven that grows and makes a feast.
3. The Kingdom is like wheat that grows and is separated from the tares.

Now Jesus says, Matthew 13:44-50

1. The Kingdom is like treasure that's found and in great joy, the man sells all he has to buy that field.
2. It's like a pearl so great that when it is found, the merchant freely chooses to sell all to buy it.
3. It's like a net dropped into the sea, and the evil one separated from the righteous and burned in a fiery furnace where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth. . .

[Peter begins to sing.] "One of these things is not like the other, One of these things just doesn't belong . . ." Or maybe it does, because Jesus seems to say it does. Maybe it's the same thing from a different angle. Did you notice that actually, in all three stories, there was a separation – that is a judgment?

⁵ There's a separation. The older brother – offended by grace stands in outer darkness in a field and the father goes out to get him.

- In the first story, the finder is separated from “all that he has,” but he’s separated by joy. In his joy, *“he sells all he has and buys the field.”*
- In the second story, the seeker is separated from “all that he has” by finding the pearl. He freely chooses to sell all to purchase the pearl.
- But in the third story, we don’t read about a free and joyful decision, we read about a fiery furnace.

So,

- There’s a separation by joy and a separation by fire and ultimately, I think they’re the same Judgment.
- There’s a separation in time and a separation at the close of the age and ultimately, I think they’re the same Judgment.
- In the first two stories, someone sought the Judgment. In the last story, things are caught by the Judgment.

Some would argue that the good are certain people, and that the bad are other people. But I would argue that they are an entirely different “genus,” a different species. Wheat and tares are entirely different species – like we saw last time. They don’t convert. So the good are “sons of the kingdom,” lost, but now found by the net. And the bad are ‘sons of the devil,” not people, but false people, imitation people, the people we think we create – the old man – our pride.

If you think that’s who you are, you will weep and gnash your teeth on Judgment Day. But if you believe God’s Judgment in Christ Jesus, you will surrender your pride in absolute joy; for you will see that you have been given the righteousness of God.

Instead of being burned by Grace, you will delight in Grace like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace in Daniel 3, like the disciples praising God in tongues of fire in Acts 2. In other words, you will “*understand*” and you will “*seek*” because you will know that you have always been sought; always been sought by “*the kingdom of God and His righteousness.*” That’s the Judgment – His Word. If you “*seek*” a kingdom, it literally means that you “*seek the judgment of its king,*” the dominion of the king. “*King – dom,*” that’s what it means. You desire the judgment of the King.

So, if the king has an enemy, that enemy would do everything in his power to get the king’s subjects to fear or distrust the king’s judgment, so they would not seek the king’s judgment, but would reject the king’s judgment, maybe even crucify the king’s judgment. The King’s judgment is His Word. Jesus says:

Matthew 13: 51-52

“Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.” And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe (student of scripture) who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

The Kingdom is spread throughout space and time, even your space and time. So, “*Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us . . .*” writes Paul. The new covenant is in the old covenant and the old covenant always testifies to the new. So Jesus says, “Guys, some new stuff will be happening, but pay attention because it’s also old.”

You’ll find a tree in a garden.

You'll see a Lamb that is slain,
Captives will be set free.

A sanctuary will be built and a sanctuary will be broken, the veil will be split, the Judgment will be revealed, and the Kingdom will come . . . on a tree, of death and life; in a field, in a place of great pain, surrounded by chaos and hell.

In Luke 18: 31 - 34, Jesus takes the twelve and says,

"See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished; for he will be delivered over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked, and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise." But they understood none of these things.

Jesus asks, "Do you understand?" No, they don't understand, and they don't seek. Like Isaiah and Saint Paul write, "*None is righteous. No one understands. No one seeks.*" We should, but don't. "*No one seeks.*" So what's the point of the three parables? Well, maybe the point is more than just law (that is what we should do and don't do). Maybe the point is what God *does* do and we *will do* by grace. Look at them one more time. Matthew 13: 44-50

You know, in the first parable, the man really doesn't seek the treasure. He stumbles on it almost like someone put the treasure in his path, so once seeing it he'd sacrifice everything for it. The man can't afford to buy the treasure, but he can afford to buy the dirt it's found in.

But the Pearl Merchant does seek the pearl, and He can afford this pearl . . . of great price. And He pays "*the great price.*" Jesus uses a different word here, "*Sell*" is *piprastio* – it was used for selling slaves. The Pearl Merchant sells all He has and is . . . to pay for the pearl. It's like He empties himself and becomes a slave in order to purchase this pearl. Jesus says, "*The kingdom of heaven is like the merchant.*" Jesus is the merchant and we are His pearl.

His pearl is His people, gathered around a tree in a field, in a place of great pain where He endures hell on our behalf.

His pearl is His people gathered around the wound: His body broken, and blood shed

His pearl is also a new you made of His Grace. It starts as an irritation in your flesh ("sin in the flesh") and turns into the Kingdom of Grace. God is Grace.

In the third story, Jesus said, "*the kingdom is like a dragnet*" that draws all things to itself.

John 6: 44 Jesus says,

"No one can come to me unless the Father draws him..."

See? No one seeks, but the Father seeks and how does the Father seek?

John 12: 31

"Now is the judgment of this world," says Jesus, "and I, when I am lifted up (and he spoke of the tree) I will draw (like a great drag net) draw all people to myself."

At the cross of Christ, God destroys our bad judgments and reveals His good judgment.
At the cross, God destroys the old man and reveals the new.
He burns the tares and gathers the wheat.
He destroys what is evil and reveals what is good.
His death is the dragnet.

According to scripture, He even descends into the depths of the earth and preaches to "*the spirits in prison that didn't obey in the days of Noah.*"
He even descends into your dirt, pain, and chaos.

At the cross, He sows Himself like treasure in every field
He is the seed. He's the leaven.
He's the treasure in your earthen vessel.
He's the grace that covers your wound and makes a pearl.
He is the judgment that sorts out your chaos with logos.

And that's where you find Him: where He has found you
– not in a program, or a book, or a seminary, or even a church building.
You find Him in your dirt, pain, and chaos, - the place you're most terrified to look, the place He sacrificed Himself for you. He is the Judgment of God.

You know, Matthew usually writes, "kingdom of heaven," Mark or Luke write, "kingdom of God." You see, heaven and God are interchangeable. Heaven is God, and God is Heaven, and God is seeking you with His Word.

So that whole time that Israel journeyed through the wilderness seeking the kingdom, the Kingdom was in their midst, seeking them. God was in the Sanctuary, but they couldn't look, for they couldn't bear the glory. (Jesus revealed that we are the Sanctuary and we will contain the Glory.)

So, the whole time that Moses and Israel thought they were seeking God, they weren't seeking God, but God was seeking them. He was with them – seeking them. He was seeking to be sought by them. He is our Father and He is Heaven. He is Love, - longing to be loved. That's what I wanted from my kids on Easter morning.

See? It's like God, the Father, arranged the entire scavenger hunt. I mean the Big Bang, and dinosaurs and the tree in the garden, and Israel, and Egypt, and Babylon, and Rome, and your terrible week combined with the stories we just read—all to get you to seek Him and find Him standing next to our empty tomb on Easter morning.

But, He not only arranges the scavenger hunt, He gives you His Spirit to cause you to seek. He arranges for the dirt, pain, and chaos, and He provides the seed. It's faith, hope, and love that take root and grow in dirt, pain, and chaos. He wants you, to want Him – as He wants you. He seeks you – seeking Him. He is your Kingdom of Heaven and you are His.

The Green mile is one of my favorite movies of all time. John Coffee is a black man on death row in the 1930's wrongfully accused of murder. He's a gentle giant, who acts just like Jesus. His prison guards ask him if they can save him from "this hour" (the electric chair) and this is what he says:

Clip from the film *The Green Mile*

[The scene opens with John Coffee, the prisoner, and Paul Edgecomb, the guard, seated together talking]

John Coffee: (squinting) *Why'd you do such a foolish thing?*

Paul Edgecomb: *On the day of my judgment, when I stand before God, and he asks me why did I, - did I kill one of his true - miracles, what am I goin' to say? That it was my job? (whispering and looking down) It was my job.*

John Coffee: *You tell God the Father, it was a kindness you done. (He reaches out and puts his hand over both of the guard's in the guards lap) I know you're hurtin' an' worryin', I can feel it on you, but you ought'a quit on it now. Because I want it over and done wit'. I do. I'm tired, boss....Mostly, I'm tired of people bein' ugly to each other. I'm tired of all the pain I feel and hear in the world everyday. They's too much of it. It's like pieces o' glass in my head all the time. Can you understand?"*

Paul Edgecomb: *Yes, John, I think I can.*

Brutus "Brutal" Howell: (standing by the cell door) *Well, there must be something we can do for ya, John. There must be something that you want.*

John Coffee: (Looking down and thinking) *I ain't never seen me a flicker show.*

(The scene moves to a black and white clip of Fred Astaire singing with a big band as he dances with a woman, with the back of John Coffee's head showing in front of the screen.)

"Heaven, I'm in Heaven,
And my heart beats so that I can hardly speak,
And I seem to find the happiness I seek
When we're out together dancing cheek to cheek."

(Then the scene moves to John Coffee's face as he watches, listens to the music, and starts to gently smile in delight and then moves to show Paul Edgcomb is seated behind him watching.)

See? He seeks one thing. He's like treasure buried in a dirty field. He's the Lord's pearl of great price being formed in a place of great pain. He seeks the Kingdom of Heaven as the Kingdom of Heaven has been seeking him.

So What's Heaven? I think heaven is "dancing cheek to cheek" with the judgment of God – His name is Jesus.

Brennan Manning used to tell about a retreat he once lead. One of the attendees was a shy, mid-thirties single nun who wouldn't smile, sigh, laugh or cry. Toward the end of the retreat, he asked participants to share what the Lord had revealed to them. After a few awkward moments, the silent nun reached for her journal and read the following:

At the end of your talk, you prayed that we might experience what you had just shared. You asked us to close our eyes. Almost the moment I did, something happened. In faith I was transported into a large ballroom filled with people. I was sitting by myself on a wooden chair, when a man approached me, took my hand, and led me onto the floor. He held me in his arms and led me in the dance.

The tempo of the music increased and we whirled faster and faster. The man's eyes never left my face. His radiant smile covered me with warmth, delight, and a sense of acceptance. Everyone else on the floor stopped dancing. They were staring at us. The beat of the music increased and we pirouetted around the room in reckless rhythm. I glanced at his hands, and then I knew. Brilliant wounds of a battle long ago, almost like a signature carved in flesh. The music tapered to a slow, lilting melody and Jesus rocked me back and forth. As the dance ended, he pulled me close to him. Do you know what he whispered? . . . 'Christine, I'm wild about you.'

I think that's the judgment of God.

I had a terrible week this week. I can't tell you why, but by Wednesday night, the dirt, the pain, and the chaos were just too much. I had become convinced of three things: I was a failure as a dad, a failure as a husband, and a failure as a pastor. And so I just wanted to stop walking and stop seeking. That was the danger when I used to play Hide-n-Seek with my kids. My hiding made me worth seeking, but sometimes my kids could get discouraged and give up, so I'd make a noise or clear my throat. Meister Eckhart, (the fourteenth century mystic), wrote, "God is like a person who clears his throat while hiding and so gives himself away." I'd clear my throat, they'd find me, I'd jump out, grab them, cover them with kisses and issue my judgment: "I love you, I love you, I love you."⁶

Well, last Wednesday praying with friends, my wife had a vision of three open doors and I could go through any and all. I think they were being a dad, being a husband, and being a pastor. So the choice was to give up or to seek the kingdom in each of those places. That night, and then preparing this sermon I didn't want to write, I think I began to hear God's judgment, "Peter, I'm wild about you!"

⁶ When my kids were little and we had nothing to do, I used to take them hunting for fossilized *Inoceramus* clams. You can find them in upper cretaceous limestone beds just down the bike path from our house. Our garage used to be full of them. They're like five inches across – totally cool. Some people think these clams are a few thousand years old. I think they're 80 million years old... and much younger than a few thousand years old (but we'll write more about that later).

The first time I took my son, Jonathan, I kept showing him what they looked like, but he couldn't seem to find any. So finally, I found a nice one, set it on a ledge, and said, "Hey, buddy, this is a good spot. Come look over here."

Well, pretty soon I heard him yelling, "Oh, wow! Daddy! Daddy! I found one!" Jon cradled that clam in his arms like a treasure.

Some people would say, "Listen, Jon, these fossils are tricks played by the *Devil* to make you think the world is older than it is; to make you doubt God's Word." Some people would say, "Listen, Jon, these fossils prove there is no God."

But I said something like this:

Hey, Jon, just think! About 80 million years ago, there was a warm, shallow ocean right in this spot. Giant sea creatures swam in that ocean above this spot, and dinosaurs walked on the beach to the west of this spot. God made it *all*, and then He made this clam on the bottom of that sea. He buried it here in the mud, and the mud turned to rock. It was here when the dinosaurs became extinct and the mountains pushed up. It was here when God made Adam and Eve; it was here when Jesus walked the Earth; it was here while kingdoms rose and kingdoms fell. And when God buried it here in this spot, do you know what He was thinking about? He was thinking about *you*... and the day you would ride your bike down the bike path, climb this hill, find this clam, pick it up, and say, "Wow!" You see, Jon, you must matter to Him... *a lot*.

Jon found the fossil

because the Father used the fossil
to find Jon's heart.

You may be seeking the Father,
but with all creation

the Father is seeking your heart.

You see? That judgment in that place of dirt, pain, and chaos does something: it causes “me” to surrender “me,” that is my faith in my ability to make myself a good dad, a good husband, a good pastor. I forget me and find in me a new desire. I want to seek treasure in those four fields that are my children. I want to give everything for the pearl that is my bride, and I want to preach the gospel, even in the depths of hell.

Well, I’m just saying: I think the Kingdom of Heaven is like that.

Communion

So Jesus took bread and broke it saying this is my body given to you. Take and eat and do this in remembrance of me. And in the same way, He took the cup saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, and do it in remembrance of me.”

This is the Judgment of God, the decision of God. Jesus means “God saves” “God is salvation;” it’s a decision. This is the Judgment of God, Look at it! It’s in this place surrounded in the midst of our dirt, pain, and chaos. He says your name. And then, do you see what He’s saying, to do something like this? “I’m wild about you. Would you be wild about me?”

The Kingdom of God is like that.

Prayer

And so Lord, the dry bones will cry out “Great are you Lord!” And Ezekiel says those dry bones are the whole house of Israel, So Lord God, we thank you that one day every creature on heaven and earth, and under the earth, and in the sea, and all that is in them will cry out, “Great are You!” Because they will see you and they’ll rejoice in the incredible Judgment that you have proclaimed, Lord God, in Christ Jesus our lord. So they will sing, we will sing, “Great are You, Lord”, but we’re saying it right now. “Great are you, Lord!” The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand and we thank you, Father, that even when we did not seek, *you* sought, and *you* found, and *you* will take us home. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Benediction

So I think I titled this sermon something like the Kingdom of Heaven and How it’s Found. And, you see, I think it’s found when you come to believe that it’s found you and it’s always been looking for you. In other words, it’s found when you believe the Gospel. And so, may you believe the Gospel.

And now, I didn’t know how to include this, but it’s important. I said the Kingdom is like a treasure that’s found in a place of dirt, pain, and chaos. It’s like this:

Clip from *Caddy Shack*

<p>[The scene opens with a young woman in a checked bathing suit opening a Baby Ruth Bar. The scene pans out to show that woman opening that Baby Ruth bar while seated on the edge of a pool with a young man on one side, who is not really paying attention, and a young girl on the other, while kids shout and play in the pool behind them.]</p> <p>She puts her hand to her heart. The scene moves to the pool surface showing the candy bar floating and people swimming frantically away as others scream and scramble out of the pool. Other images of the chaos are shown. That image fades into a picture of a man in a hazmat suit push-brooming water left at the bottom of an empty swimming pool. A team of people are there to oversee the clean up. The guy in the hazmat suit: (Slides something in the pool. Gets all excited, wiping his nose, picks it up, takes his mask off, and holds it up.)</p> <p>Give me some?</p> <p>Hazmat suited guy: <i>Here it is!</i></p> <p>Young woman: (slaps his arm away) <i>Who asked you?</i></p> <p>[Everyone turns and looks at him.]</p> <p>Young man: <i>Come on! I'm askin'!</i></p> <p>Old woman: (makes a facial expression of disgust) <i>Uhhh- Ohhhh!</i></p> <p>[The Baby Ruth bar plunks into the pool. The scene pans out and the young man take his arm back in disappointment. The guy holding the candy bar, in disgust, pulls it up to his nose, sniffs it, and takes a small bite.]</p> <p>The music from the movie <i>Jaws</i> starts to play as the Baby Ruth Bar is shown bobbing to the music in the water. He reaches across for it as she looks at him, blocks it with one hand, and with the other pulls it away and holds it toward the young girl. The young girl takes the whole thing out of the package, leaving the young woman with the wrapper and whips it away from the young man's hand. The young man continues to try to persuade the young woman until, suddenly, the young girl throws the Baby Ruth bar into the pool, grinning. The scene closes on the hazmat guy, enjoying the Baby Ruth bar.]</p> <p>show the young man putting on his baseball hat on in disappointment as the young woman looks towards the young girl.]</p>	<p>Young woman: (whining to the young girl) <i>Hey, thanks a lot!</i></p> <p>[The young girl shrugs and the scene moves to the candy bar bobbing in the pool full of kids playing. Then it shows the whole pool with a bunch of people splashing, yelling, diving in, swimming, and doing hand stands as the <i>Jaws</i> theme song resumes, playing quicker and quicker as the candy bar bobs along and people play unsuspectingly. Suddenly a girl in a pool floatie ring spots the candy bar in the water in front of her]</p> <p>Little girl: <i>Dirty! . . . Dirty!</i></p> <p>[The bar is shown from underwater. Then it shows the little girl tries to kick away from it as she screams. An older woman, formally dressed and watching by the side of the pool, sees what is going on and screams in disgust.]</p> <p>Old woman: <i>Ohhh!</i></p> <p>(Images of people chaotically jumping off floaties, swimming away and screaming ensues.)</p> <p>Old woman: (waving her arms in dismay) <i>Don't! Ah! Don't touch it!</i></p>
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Caddy Shack clip continued...

So, anyway, the Kingdom of Heaven is kind of like that!

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.