

June 24, 2007 i "Heart Matters; Part 5 - Buying the Field"

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Let's go Matthew 13. I want to wrap up our current series today. I want to do that by recapping where we've been the last five weeks, and I want to do that extensively. And the reason I want to do that extensively is because I really believe that the things we've been talking about the last five weeks are paramount for what becomes of us as individuals and what becomes of us corporately as a local community of Christ followers. And so I want to recap where we've been, and then from there, I want us to get into Matthew 13 and then I want to ask us a question. Five weeks ago, we started looking at men biblically who longed for God in a way that seemed almost foreign to us. I mean, there were men in the Scriptures and men historically who longed for God in this passionate, unbelievable way and where they felt like they fell short of that or weren't walking with Him in the intimacy that they knew they could or if they started struggling with sin, there seemed to be a deep and abiding agony in them to get back to walking intimately with God. And in that struggle, in that angst, in that agony, you have some of the most beautiful texts of Scripture ever written. You have king David saying, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Put your hope in God." You have him saying, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation." And in the Bible Belt and in our westernized society, we make that verse very cute and we put it on a coffee cup and we're like, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation." But in regards to what he's writing, it is this agony in his soul that what was once fresh in his soul and alive and vibrant had grown stale, and he was in agony over it. He would say, "As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs for You." In fact, he was so distraught with where he felt he was in regards to walking intimately with God that it says he stayed up all through the night and could think of nothing else but Him. And we studied other men like Habakkuk who would say, "I don't care if I have food, I don't care if I have shelter, I don't care if I have money. If I have You, I have all that I want." We studied Paul saying, "I count all things as rubbish next to the surpassing greatness of knowing You." And then we looked historically at Owen, at Calvin, at Augustine, at Brother Lawrence, at men and women who walked in this unbelievable zeal and passion for the things of God, and where sin crept in or where they felt distant from God, they found life almost unbearable. And not only were men and women historically zealous for God who felt a level of agony when they felt far from Him, but Romans 8 would say even creation, all of the universe is groaning and longing for the second coming of Christ when the weight of sin has finally been removed off of them. So even creation groans and longs and is at a certain level in agony. The text even says that all of creation is under the pain of childbirth. Now, I'm not a woman, I haven't done that. But I've been in the room twice, and I don't want any part of that. That's Lauren's part of the fall. My part is completely different. That's hers to walk in, Christ redeem it. I've been in the room, but I haven't experienced that pain. And the Scriptures say every corner of the universe is currently, right now, in this moment experiencing pain at the weight and hard pressing of God on the universe because of sin. It's in agony, and it wants it lifted and it eagerly watches the sons and daughters of the king hoping that God would remove the press He put on all of creation. So we ended that week with a question. The question wasn't about men and women historically and what they felt about God and how they pursued Him. And I don't even want to talk the science of creation and earthquakes and tornadoes and wolves howling and all of those things. Honestly, I don't care about all those things. The question that I think we have to answer is: Why don't we groan like that? Why don't we long like that? Why don't we ache like that? Why are so many of us so contented with the weak levels, with the shallow levels of intimacy that we experience with Christ? Why are we so content in our sin? Why are we so comfortable with the fact that the things that we read and the things

that we regard as godly we can't seem to get into? Where is the man and woman who stays awake all night long saying, "How long, O Lord, will You forsake me?" Where are they? They're almost extinct it seems. And then I just completely left you hanging. I just ended the sermon and left.

So in week two, we tried to answer it. Why don't we long? Why don't we desire? Why are we so content? Why don't we want more than we're walking in? Why are we so comfortable with the shallow places that we find ourselves? Why are we rested in the fact that we know so much in our fat, fat, fat heads that never get anywhere near our soul and make any kind of life change? Why are we okay with that? Why doesn't that scare the lives out of us? So we tried to answer it in week two. And we said that one thing that might be happening is idolatry. And I don't mean worshiping a monkey, a golden monkey of course. I don't mean idolatry in that sense. I think that our idols are probably usually dumber than golden monkeys if there was such a thing. I mean, come on, out of the entire animal kingdom, the monkey? How we defined an idol in week two was a desire, and desires aren't inherently evil or wicked, but it's a desire that we close our hand around and it becomes a non-negotiable. So we say, "God, You do whatever You want and I'll do anything You want me to do, but just don't touch this." And it could be anything. It could be a relationship, it could be stuff, it could be a trinket, it could be your kids, it could be your marriage, it could be this country, it could be your safety. It could be anything, but we close our hands around it and we say, "We'll do what ever You want to do and we'll go wherever You want us to go and You be God, but I just don't want You to touch this. I don't want to talk about it. This is mine." Now although that doesn't sound like such a big deal, the problem we found with it is in Ezekiel 14, that when you try to come to God intimately but you come with an idol, He doesn't want to talk about anything except your idol. So every time you press into God, every time you want to draw near in intimacy with Him, He's going to say, "What's in your right hand? What have you closed up?" And He's not asking because He needs to know. He's not asking because He's not sure. He wants to talk about what you've closed your hands around. So what ends up happening, specifically here in the Bible Belt, is we're contented with a shallow version of what it means to follow Christ where we refuse to press in deeply because we know if we do, He's going to bring up the non-negotiable. And where we find our lives playing out, I really believe that you don't necessarily have to be godly at all to be a churchman. You just have to learn the language, you have to learn when to raise your hands, you have to read the right books. And in the end, what happens is you don't have any intimacy with God yourself; you instead live vicariously through the vibrant faith of others. And that's why everybody down here loves to quote preachers; few people ever quote their Bibles. Because they're not going to get in it themselves because the Lord's going to want to do business and talk about the closed hand. But if all we do is listen Swindoll or Nelson or Piper or one of those, then all we do is regurgitate what they said and we come off looking godly without ever having to discuss the right hand. Grown men playing in the kiddie pool is what we are spiritually. It's tragic. And so in the end, we don't know ourselves, we don't walk deeply ourselves, we don't know Him intimately ourselves, we just keep our hand closed here and learn the right language and it's devastating.

But it's not the only thing that gets us. Pride can absolutely devastate. God ordained the universe to work in such a way where He said, "The proud, I will not know. I am going to know them from afar. They are not going to draw near to Me because when I give them a word, they're not going to think it's for them, they're going to think I'm telling them that word so they can tell others." And here's how that works. Christ speaks and we're like, "I sure with Cathy was here. She needs to hear this." And here's pride. Pride in the Evangelical community is us not pressing in and humbly walking before the Lord

ourselves because we don't have any problems. We kind of define life morally. And so we go, "Morally, I'm not struggling. I'm a good guy. I do good things. I'm good. So I don't have any problems. Other people have problems, and I'm here to fix them." And then you live in this unbelievable world of deceit where everyone else is always the problem, never you. You've been fired like eighteen times, but at every one of them you could tell exactly what their problem was. And you are unable to stay in any kind of deep, real relationship. And you could tell me a story about all 612 of the friends you've tried to have since you were in the third grade and why they were all unraveled because you loved Christ so much that you're threatening to them. And on and on and on we could go. Pride's just devastating. Because in the end, you expect everyone else to be the very thing you're not. And God's not going to draw near to you. "The proud, I know from afar."

And then we talked about the hardening work of God. That was a chipper few moments. And we talked about how sometimes God just hardens the heart. And down here in the Evangelical capitol of the world, we don't like that idea. And listen, I love warm, fuzzy, good-feeling Christianity, but I just like the Bible more, I just like the gospel more. So in the end, God has a hardening work. I would say if you're in here tonight and you desire to know Him deeply and you're trying to walk and you're trying to figure this out and you're hungry for this thing, I think that's great evidence that that hasn't happened to you, but it's one of the things. Idolatry and pride, they never come out as idolatry and pride. They come out in other ways. They come out in relational dysfunction, they come out in vanity, they come out in envy, they come out in lust, they rear all these different fruits when the root is idolatry and pride. So in week three, we talked about: How do we know if these things have taken root in our heart? How do we know if we have idolatry, if we have pride, if those are the reasons why we're having a difficult time intimately walking with the Lord? So in week three, we got into money. And everybody got real nervous and grabbed their wallet and their purse, but we did not take up an offering. I do not believe I need a new private jet to reach the nations and I don't wear cuff links. So we're not building a building, we didn't pass any kind of plate, but the Scriptures say, "Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth where it's temporary and where moth can destroy it, people can steal it or at best, you die and your children splurge." So it says, "Don't do that when you can store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where none of that happens." And so He says, "Hey listen, instead of sowing into a merely present economy, let's live life for a future economy." And we talked about the fact that where our treasure is, there our heart is, there our emotions are, there our spirit is. And wherever the emotions and the spirit are, the mind will always justify getting what this wants. So here's what we said. The reason money is so difficult is because it will call you a liar. Here's what I mean. Down here, you can run your mouth all you want about the greatness of God and how good He is and how beautiful He is and how right He is and you can get John 3:16 tattooed on your throat, you can do all of those things and you can buy the t-shirt with the buck and "As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs for You," you can put nine ichthuses on your car, depending on how big your family is, you can do that whole deal, but your checkbook will reveal what you really value. So you can yap your mouth all you want and you can come to church all you want and you can do all of the religious games you want, but in the end if your money is your money and all of it is spent on you and all of it is spent on what you want and you have not concept of a greater kingdom and a greater purpose for which you're here and that money was given to you, your treasure is not the kingdom of God, your treasure is you. And that's what makes money so difficult, because it doesn't have an opinion, because it doesn't love you or hate you. It just betrays you and shows you who you really are. And so I even gave you an example. You can spend \$200 a month at Starbucks and you're giving away \$3 to the poor

and the needy and the hurting. There is an issue. But we do not want to take it to that level, we do not want to check, we do not want to look. Where your treasure is, there's your heart. No one can serve two masters. You can't chase both God and money. The reason is because both of them have this unbelievable power of mastery. And so what that means is we either serve God and chase God and pursue God as our treasure and we see everything in our life as subordinate, underneath, given to us by God for God, so our money, our homes, our cars, our free time, everything has been given to us by Him for Him, we're mastered by God or we're mastered by money and stuff and things and we chase that and God becomes our little errand boy that runs and gets what we want when we ring our little bell of morality and religion. We say, "Hey, I'm good and I'm nice to my family and I go to church (ring ring ring ring) Get me a bigger house." And if it doesn't happen, we're angry. "Hey, I'm this, I've done this, I've said this, I go here, I'm teaching that Sunday school class. (ring ring ring ring) You owe me health." And that's what ends up happening when you chase this and try to attach Christ's name to it. Christ becomes the butler, the maid. He fetches things for you or you get angry.

And then we moved on and talked about the parable of the talents in week 4. The parable of the talents we needed to get into really quickly. Some people take that text and they say, "If you juggle, you juggle for Jesus." And I do agree that if you do juggle, you ought to juggle for Jesus. But don't come out of that text because that text isn't talking about natural gifting. It's really shoddy exegesis. That text clearly says that talents are given on the basis of natural ability and are not in themselves natural abilities. And so we said, "What are the talents then?" We talked about opportunities. Not only what are you doing with your money, that reveals what you really treasure, what you really value, what you're really after, but now what you do with your opportunities also reveals what's really going on in your heart. What do you do with that spare bedroom? What do you do with your house? What do you do with that extra cash? What do you do with the boat you bought? What do you do with your vacation time? What do you do with your free nights? Do I need to keep on going? Because I can keep going for a long time. What do you do with those things? Those are gifts. If you don't understand them as gifts, you need to travel more or read. What are you doing with those opportunities? What you do with your opportunities reveals what you really value, what you really treasure, what you're really after. It reveals idolatry or pride...or both. How do you see the world? Do you see the world through the lenses of the greater kingdom, the greater calling, the greater compass, the eternal pursuit? Do you see the world like that? That's where we've been the last four weeks.

Now let's finish it. Let's go to Matthew 13. In Matthew 13, we find ourselves in the middle of seven straight stories on the kingdom of God. So Jesus, for seven straight stories, says, "The kingdom of God is like...the kingdom of God is like...the kingdom of God is like..." and so on. He's going to say it seven times through seven different stories. Let me give you just a little bit of information. The first four stories on the kingdom of God are given in front of a large crowd of men and women. The last three stories, of which we'll be in 5 and 6, they're given just to the disciples after they left the crowd. Now, let's get into these two. Starting in verse 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. 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." I would love to take the next two hours and talk to you about the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God and what it is and what it's not. Honestly, it's a 40 week series; we don't have time today. So, let me give you as quickly as I can what the kingdom of God, kingdom of heaven is. There are those that say those are two separate ideas. I

don't believe that's the case at all. I believe that they're the same thing, but let me try to explain. When Jesus is walking on the earth, the 1st century Jews are expecting Him and wanting Him, those who believe He's the Messiah, to establish a kingdom, to overthrow Roman occupation and set up the kingdom of God, the throne of David, the kingdom of heaven on earth. But Jesus over and over again is going to refute this idea. In fact, He says, "There are those that say the kingdom of God is over here or the kingdom of God is over there, but don't believe them when they say that because the kingdom of God is within you." So the kingdom of God in this text is not referring to a place or location. The kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven in this text isn't place or location but rather reign and rule. And so He's saying the reign and rule of Christ, of God over your hearts is not a location but rather inside of you. Now this is big stuff, huge. Jesus just said the kingdom of God coming in power is where what is demonic and lustful and wicked and envious and dark and unbelieving is destroyed and replaced by salvation, light, hope, healing, power. The kingdom of God ruling over the hearts of men.

Now, let's read this again. "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." So the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, the rule and reign of the omnipotent God of the universe over our souls is so infinitely valuable that the loss of everything on earth in order to get it is a happy transaction. The sovereign, omnipotent rule of God over our lives, for us, in the end for our good, no matter how painful, is of ultimate value in the universe, and the loss of all things to get it isn't a tragedy. Now for me, this starts to help make sense of the Scriptures. Here's what I mean. Job, in a matter of moments, has his entire business collapse and go bankrupt, his marriage goes south, his children die and he contracts a disease. And he tears his clothes and basically worships and says, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked will I return. The Lord has given and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." So if to know Christ and to walk with Him deeply means that if I lose my children and my business tanks and I contract a disease, praise Christ. Or have you ever thought about how strange it is that the apostles are all rounded up in the book of Acts and just beaten severely and they leave rejoicing over that? I mean, how impossible would it be to discipline your children if when you whipped them, they liked it? You could beat them and they'd just leave going, "Excellent. Thank you." What do you do with that kid? They round them up and they just beat the mess out of them. And they leave rejoicing that they were able to suffer for the sake of the name. Translation: in that suffering, they grew closer to Christ and it was worth the skin literally being beaten off their backs. If this is true, that to know Christ and to understand His sovereignty over our lives and to submit our lives to Him, if this is true, then it starts making sense of the madness of Scripture. It starts making sense of Habakkuk's going, "I don't care about cows. You can take my cows." Over and over and over again, these men go, "If nearly starving to death is going to give me more of You, please take all of my food, because You're better." Or if eating a 12oz. fillet, medium-rare with a good Cab is going to create worship in my heart, then kill the cow, put it right here, let's worship. If having money is going to bring me closer to You, then give it to me, but if it's going to rob me, then please make me poor. If I have to struggle with a difficulty or a sin or a physical ailment for all of my days on earth so that I might cling to You, then send me the ailment. Why? Because He apparently is worth it. Not only worth it in that they're like, "Okay, let's give that up so we can get Him," but the Scriptures say, "In joy, with joy, they sold all they had." With joy, they said "I'm alright with being poor." With joy, they said, "A disease, let it make me fall at Your feet. Heal me, Christ. I ask because You ask me to ask, but if this is what it is, then this is what it is. Blessed be the

name.”

I told you I would end this series the same way we began it, by asking a question. I think my question that I want to end it with today is: Will you buy the field? And I'm even nervous about saying that, because you can't buy anything from God because everything you have is His. You can't bribe Him or buy anything from Him. It's kind of this paradox. Like the apostle Paul shows us probably best what it looks like in the book of Philippians when he says, “I want to take hold of that which has already taken hold of me.” So it's not this exchange of “I'll stop being bad so that Jesus will love me.” No, this is “I want to take hold of that which has already taken hold of me. I want to chase the One who has caught me.” Let me just be honest. Do you know what I'm asking for? Do you know what I am pleading for? Courage, to have the courage to truly examine your heart and your life about what you truly value in an Evangelical culture that's so watered down and weak that it's giant and makes no impact on the world around it. I'm asking you for the courage to look deep in your heart and quit lying to yourself. I don't care if you lie to me. I'm a pastor, it happens all the time. Lie to me. I don't care. You don't have to stand in front of me and give an account for your life. Now, if you're a covenant member at this church, we'll discipline, we'll walk and we'll engage you. I can guarantee you that. When all is said and done and you can't breathe anymore, you won't stand in front of me. Even if you did, I'll be going, “Plead the blood of Christ, plead the blood of Christ...” I'm not going to be disappointed. But come on, how long can you walk, lying to yourself? And in an Evangelical culture where the very air you breathe might be poison, I'm asking you to be honest with yourself. I don't even know what it looks like for you. Like I know that some of you in here, you have a million dollars. Some of you only have thirty. And some of you wished you had thirty. Listen, I don't know what it looks like. I don't know what it looks like for the millionaire, I don't know what it looks like for the guy with thirty, but what I'm saying is you've got to wrestle. You've got to wrestle, you've got to lay your life in front of the light of the Holy Spirit and let Him read you. Because this isn't a game. It's just not. And all the trinkety, gadgety trash that we do to pretend and hide down here is going to get exposed. So what I'm pleading for is the courage to look deep now. Because that's our best shot at repentance. Because the kingdom of God is like a man who would gladly give up everything he has to grab and have the treasure. And that's the gospel and that's what it means to follow Christ. Everything else is a frilly, cheap imitation that would tell you, “If you don't cuss, don't watch this kind of movie or if you're this kind of husband or if you're this or that, that's what being a Christian is about.” No, no. That might be small pieces of it, the results of it. So will you buy the field? Will you have the courage to do the painful work of self-examination. I wanted to call this sermon series, I think they ended up calling it “Heart Matters” or something like that, but I wanted to call it “A Terrible Loneliness.” But they wouldn't let me. They were like, “Come on,” but I'm telling you now because I have a mic and they don't. And let me tell you why I wanted to call it “A Terrible Loneliness.” Because when all is said and done, you've got to wrestle with the Holy Spirit, you. Some of you as husband and wife are going to have to wrestle with some of this, but I don't think you can do that effectively until you wrestle as individuals. And it's terribly lonely because you start looking what you really do with your money, what you really do with your time, what you really do with those things that God gave you to bless you, you start really looking and you start really seeing what you really value, how you really see the world, I think that's our best shot, the Holy Spirit manifesting in power and setting us free, free from temporary trinkets. And I'm not saying temporary trinkets are bad, I'm just saying being owned by them is. Hey, I love you. I plan on being here the rest of my life, Christ willing. I've just had this hope, like this burning, crazy hope of what would happen if we actually lived half of what we said we truly believed, the

resources that would be available, the life change that would occur, the Holy Spirit's power that would flow. So will you buy the field if it costs you everything? And I think that just means that you live with open hands. Will you buy the field? I don't even know what that means.

Let's pray. Will you just bow your head and close your eyes there where you are? Could we just not run out of here? There's food to be had, there's friends to hang out with. Can we just not run out of here today? Okay, so two things are happening. I'm manipulative and I'm after your money and I want you to be unhappy or I'm pleading with you based on how God wired the universe to be. To leave and walk away from what, up until this point in your life, has not brought you what you're seeking. What's the Holy Spirit asking of You? If you see in your wallet that what you value is you, what does it look like to repent from that? You need to ask Him. I promise you He'll speak. If you look at your opportunities and you see what you value is you, how do we repent of that? Listen, it's okay to be in agony. It's okay to not have all the answers tonight. It's okay to go home and wrestle with the Lord. I think in the end, it produces such life. "Father, help us. If You won't enlighten the eyes of our heart, if You won't speak to us, then all our effort will be for nothing. So we ask not that we would run hard or even well, but just that You would stir in our hearts an affection for You that would lead to movement outside of just motivation from preacher. Father, if it's up to my motivation, my ability to motivate, it's over before Wednesday. But if You would do something in us tonight, if You would hear us as Your children crying out for your help, we agree with our brother David, restore to us the joy of our salvation. Make fresh what's grown stale. We thank You, Father, for the joys and sorrows. I trust that You are bringing about in us our good, our joy and Your glory. I pray with the things that have been spoken and revealed by Your Spirit that You would haunt us. Tonight as we lay in bed, tomorrow as we wake up, tomorrow afternoon, as we do what we do, haunt us. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."