

[Texting Question: **What's the most valuable thing you own?**]

How many of you have ever seen a show like Pawn Stars or American Pickers or Storage Wars? There's an element these shows all share in common: every now and again, someone learns that a seemingly ordinary piece of junk is actually a priceless treasure. Old coins turn out to be pirate's gold. A dusty old painting is actually from the hand of an ancient master. We *love* seeing that happen. It's why we watch those shows. We love to find value in the mist of garbage. The magic of these shows is that the treasure is buried in the midst of our everyday world. Locked away in storage lockers or attics or basements or maybe even sitting out in the open, being passed every day, ignored and overlooked, are these valuable secrets.

Those shows work because you and me – us regular people - don't know how to value our world well. The show reveals a truth we already know: most people don't know what they have. Watch this: [\[Pawn Stars video: start at 2:30\]](#)

We're like the guy who owned that gold bar (which most of us would know is pretty valuable). But he didn't know the first thing about gold bars. He didn't know how to tell this was more than just a gold bar. It's a 15th century sunken pirate treasure gold bar! It's worth at least double what it seems to be worth, to the right collector.

That's not the end of the world when we're talking about antiques. It's not even the worst tragedy if that guy had only sold his gold bar for a measly \$24,000 instead of \$48K. But if it can be true about a chair or a piece of jewelry or a piece of pirate treasure, couldn't the same be true of our families, our vocations, our faith? We live in a world of routines, of plans, of calendars and smartphones. Mostly we go from day to day the same way we move through our possessions: they're automatic, ordinary.

That's why shows like Pawn Stars stir our imaginations: for a handful of minutes our ordinary worlds are transformed into rooms full of buried treasure. Suddenly, we're surrounded by secrets waiting to be revealed. At the end of the episode, we return to our ordinary, everyday lives, to our plain homes and normal possessions and wonder: what treasures lie here? What am I overlooking, walking past every day?

Is it possible that I'm ignoring a priceless treasure right in front of me?

That's an exciting thought because, initially, we're thrilled by the prospect of more money - who isn't? But the magic of these silly shows runs deeper than that, touches something deep in our souls that knows our world is magical, that there's more to life than just what's happening in the ordinary, everyday world.

These stories make us dream of an expert who could come into our ordinary world and reveal something extraordinary, something priceless. Because if it could be true of our possessions, what of us?

Could it be that somewhere, in the middle of our ordinary lives something extraordinary waits for us?

The good news is that our instinct is right on: that sense you have that there's more to life than the everyday grind is accurate. There's a life waiting just beyond the life you're living, life overflowing with beauty and power and possibility.

That life is yours for the taking. It's here and available for you and the good news is that all it will cost you is everything.

...

Let me be crystal clear: there is a life waiting for you, hidden in the midst of the life you're living right now. And it's incomparably better, so much so that it makes the life you're living right now look... well, not much like real life. This hidden life is yours for the taking. All for the low, low price of everything you have... the whole of the life you're living right now. [maybe a pricetag that reads "\$Everything?"]

Quite the sales pitch, isn't it?

That claim strikes us as absurd. Who would pay such a high price for anything? Especially for religion. Because let's get real: you're at church, I'm a pastor and this is a sermon. We're talking about Jesus today.

Not a big surprise. And not necessarily *bad*. Our culture values religion. We all love spirituality. But only if it stays behind closed doors. Religion is something you and your family do in the privacy of your own home. But when you come out in public, whether you're on the soccer fields with your kids or in the voting booth, at a PTA meeting or at work, you keep your religion to yourself.

[Let's do a pic of a kitchen with a new dishwasher] To employ a crude example, we think of choosing to follow Jesus in the same way we might consider putting a new dishwasher in our kitchen. We do a sort of cost-benefits analysis: which dishwasher is the best? Do we really need a dishwasher? Well, it's going to make our lives easier overall. Save some time here that we can then invest over there, so we choose a model and go with it. And the best appliances sort of disappear. They allow our lives to function more smoothly. They don't require too much upkeep (which means they don't demand our attention).

That's how we like our religion. We hear it's good, that it promotes stability in the home and mental wellbeing. We have all those studies about how religious people tend to be happier and live longer, so we shop around. Find one we like - most of us here in Texas choose some brand of Christianity because it's the most popular. We install it in our lives and we like it best when it requires little upkeep. We check in a few times a month, maybe participate in a C-group occasionally. Our kids like it, our spouses like it (or at least tolerate it), and we meet some pretty cool people. Good enough, we think.

That's why the claim that Jesus' new life, this excessive, overflowing life that is truly life, this new thing God is doing - to claim that will cost us everything strikes us as foolish. Because if religion is an additive to our lives, something we attach to make the rest of our life better, it makes no sense to sacrifice that life for Jesus.

[For this next bit, a pic of just the dishwasher on a vacant lot]

If religion is like an additive, an appliance, it's not worth our whole lives. No matter how awesome that dishwasher is, you'd never sell your whole house to buy it. A dishwasher is totally useless without a kitchen, without plumbing. Without electricity. The whole point of a dishwasher is to make the whole kitchen better. So to scrap the kitchen for the dishwasher doesn't make any sense.

So too, if the point of following Jesus is to make the life we're already living better, then to abandon that life for the sake of following Jesus is silly.

And yet that's exactly what Jesus claims. So what are we missing? Could it be possible that the problem isn't with Jesus, but with us? With *our* picture of religion, our dream of what that excessive, abundant life actually looks like? Could there be a religion that doesn't just improve the life we're living, but teaches us the path to a whole new life?

Turn with me to Matthew 13. If you grabbed one of our Bibles on the way in, it's on page XXXX. If you don't own a Bible, we'd be honored if you'd consider that Bible a gift from us and take it with you. This summer we've been exploring these stories Jesus told. They're short, provocative stories Jesus uses to invite us to consider more carefully the character and nature of God's new life.

Parables, in other words, are meant to help us slow down a bit. Let's read today's parable, beginning in verse 45:

“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.” -- Matthew 13:44-46

Jesus tells us two little stories of men who make what seem on the surface to be poor investments: one buys a field with a buried treasure. Another is a merchant on the lookout for "choice pearls". Both guys are just like the Pawn Stars: trained to discern between trash and treasure. Pearls - like any fine gem - come in varying quality. And someone like me, who knows nothing about pearls, couldn't reliably distinguish between a pearl and a marble. But Jesus' pearl merchant has learned the difference between a pretty nice pearl and a great pearl.

And now, in his travels, moving from city to city, buying and selling pearls, he finds that pearl: the one he'd been searching for all his life. The pearl he wasn't even sure existed: a pearl so pure and beautiful and good that it's worth literally everything.

That sounds a little foolish to us, but it would've made some sense to his original audience, who was more familiar with the pearl diving industry.

Of course we're not familiar with the pearl diving industry. Because we're not ancient Near Eastern Mediterranean peasants. Jesus' parables were delivered to the people around him in language they could understand. He didn't use a bunch of religious language, words you had to have a degree in theology to understand. He told stories about things in their everyday lives. Sheep and families and merchants.

Which can make it tough for us really to "get" Jesus' stories. Because we're in a different time, a different culture. So usually in sermons, we have to do a bunch of work to get the original context. But by the time you finish all the explaining, it's like when you have to explain the joke: you get it, but it's not funny anymore. So we get the parable, but we miss the emotional punch of the story.

My friend Matt Mikalatos just put out a book called *The First Time We Saw Him*, where he asks the question, What would Jesus' stories have sounded like if Jesus had come today, if his stories were about things in *our* everyday world rather than *their* everyday world.

So for the next several weeks, we're going to hear these stories in today's culture. And we'll see what it felt like for Jesus' original audience to hear them.

First up is the story of this pearl merchant, who Matt reimagines as a guy named Roland, perusing flea markets looking for good deals. Imagine you had asked Jesus what God's life is like and he said this:

Roland is walking around at the flea market. [image of Flea Market for setting?] It's an open air place, and every once in a while between the stalls of homemade driftwood clocks and antique store leftovers and worthless comic books from the 1990's he finds something interesting. Something valuable. A Beatles 45, maybe, in near mint condition, still in its sleeve. Or an original, hand made Alfred Shaheen Aloha shirt. A piece of scrimshaw on mammoth bone. The sort of thing that can be bought and resold at a profit. Roland doesn't have tons of cash, but he has enough to scrape out a living this way.

Then one day he discovers something amazing. He's half-heartedly flipping through some old movie posters shrink-wrapped against cardboard backings and there between a Casablanca reproduction poster and a beat up Jimi Hendrix concert poster is a bundle of original art. He picks it up and pulls it out and looks at it closer and his heart starts pounding.

The first page is a man in tights with a cape behind him, holding an automobile over his head and smashing it into the ground, while men in suits scurry out of the way. With shaking hands he flips through it and finds eight glorious pages of inked comic book art. He sees the signature in the corner of one page and he cannot believe it. Jerry Siegel. One of the creators of Superman, and the artist who invented the iconic hero. [pic of Action #1]

Now, Roland knows that a "very fine" copy of Action #1, the first appearance of Superman, sold for a million dollars at auction. Because it's so old, finding a copy with clean white paper and tight edges and a crisp spine is rare. But this appears to be the original art for Action #1. And it's signed by the artist, the co-creator of Superman. He realizes that these eight pages could mean a new life for him. Each page could bring in a couple million dollars and the cover... well, he could probably set any price he wanted for that and it would sell. These eight pages literally mean the difference between shopping at the flea market and shopping on Rodeo Drive.

Does the owner of the stall know how much the pages are worth? Probably not. Not if he's bringing them here, to the flea market, and wedging them in with the poster. He tucks the pages under his arm, picks up the Casablanca poster and gets ready to haggle. "How much for these posters?" he asks.

The owner grins at him, a sparkle in his eye. "A hundred bucks for the Bogart poster. And four hundred grand for the Superman pages. And that price is firm. No haggling."

Four hundred grand! The pages are worth way more than that, at least ten times that. Probably more. Roland starts doing the math. His house is worth maybe half that. He could sell his car. All of his flea market finds would have to go. His watch. In fact, he would probably have to sell his clothes, his skis, his television, his computer. Maybe, just maybe, if he sells every last thing he owns, if he maxes out his cards and gets a loan and gets a fair price on the house, he might be able to scrape it up.

So he shakes hands with the man and says it's a deal and he races home to sell his house and his car and his clothes and his computer and his kitchen pans and hammock and his cufflinks and his waffle iron. And it's not much later that, penniless and homeless, he walks away from the flea market with some priceless original art tucked under his arm. He's wearing his oldest pair of jeans, torn and paint-spattered, and a pair of flip-flops no one would buy. He doesn't even have enough change for bus fare.

But with each step toward the auction house, his smile grows brighter. He doesn't leave scowling or dwelling on his sacrifice. He leaves whistling. He can't wait to brag to his friends about the amazing deal he just got. He'll do a showing where he frames each page and lines a wall in a gallery and by then he'll be a millionaire and his friends will say, "How much did it cost?" and he'll say, "It was a bargain, it only cost me everything."

[/Mikalatos]

Can you imagine finding that treasure that was unquestionably worth your entire life? No haggling, no wondering, no comparing prices. You just know intimately and immediately that what you've found is worth everything.

The pearl merchant knew right away because he'd cultivated an understanding of what made a pearl valuable. I could look at five pearls all next to each other and have not the slightest clue what was valuable and what wasn't. But not this merchant.

Same with our friend Roland. If you didn't know who Jerry Siegel was, or know enough about comics to recognize the cover of Action Comics #1 (or even know what that is), you could leaf right past those pages. But to a trained eye, they're priceless.

To our untrained eyes, Jesus' insistence that his new life costs us our old lives might sound foolish. As foolish as a man selling his life for a little round ball of pearl. Or as silly as a guy divesting himself of all his assets for a few pictures drawn by a long-dead teenager.

We hear Jesus' offer and think, who would sell their house for a new dishwasher?

But Jesus comes to us as a pearl merchant. As a comic book expert. As a teacher offering us a new kind of religion: not an appliance, an additive that makes our lives a little better. But as a whole new kind of life.

A religion that can't be constrained to the private sphere of our lives, a little something for the weekend that gets us through our weeks. A religion that doesn't just improve our ordinary lives a little, make them a little more tolerable, manageable or more convenient, but a whole new life. A different way to live in the world.

Not a new dishwasher in an old kitchen, but a whole new house, a whole new neighborhood, a whole new world. It's safe to say that Jesus didn't come to update our religion, or to give us a new religion to replace whatever we were doing before. Jesus came to give us a whole new life. One that transforms how we live in public, too.

Following Jesus transforms how we work, how we vote, how we parent (at home and on the soccer field), how we are married, how we date, how we are alone. The life Jesus offers us costs us everything.

As he says later in Matthew:

Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. -- Matthew 16:25

The new life Jesus offers us is so much better, so much bigger than the life we lived before that "everything" is a small price to pay. When we encounter God and are transformed, when we realize the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we can't believe the deal we're getting.

This is why those who follow Jesus can't help but brag about Jesus. When you're able to discern the difference between a life without Jesus and a life of following Jesus, it's a no-brainer. But discerning that difference isn't automatic. We don't naturally want the things of God. We don't know to look for what Jesus is already doing around us.

We're like those people who wander into Pawn Stars, not realizing what we have.

And Jesus comes to us like that pearl merchant. Like Roland the flea market shopper. He reveals the beauty, the power and the wealth hiding in the middle of our lives, what God is already doing we didn't see.

And when we do see it, we can't believe it. We say to God, Wait, I get this, and all it costs me is everything?! You've got a deal!

So does "investing my life in God's kingdom" mean I have to start going to church all the time, that every moment of my waking day be spent with my nose in a Bible or here in the Church building?

[A pie chart?] No... that's what it would mean if God were a part of our lives... if our lives were divided so that our families get so much and job gets so much and hobbies get so much and God gets this much, then we would need to increase the God wedge and decrease the rest.

[vs. God pie?] But that's not what Jesus is saying. Jesus is transforming every part of our lives, irrupting out of the slice of our world we've confined him to and transforming our families, our jobs, our hobbies, our whole existence.

Jesus reveals that we're all investing our lives in something. We've all been given life: a tremendous gift. We all have talents, abilities, energies, passions. And we're giving them to something. Maybe it's a 401-K. Maybe it's to a relationship. To a cause or passion. Maybe you're giving your life to your kids (or to what you want for your kids).

What is getting your best? At the end of the day, where did you spend your energies, your time, your love?

The Kingdom of God is here. It's all around you, waiting like a priceless pearl. If you recognize it, you'll invest everything you have in it. It'll cost you everything. But it's worth far more than you can possibly imagine.

You'll tell everyone you know that it cost you your life and it's easily worth twice the price. It cost you everything and you got the deal of a lifetime.

Examine

I want to close today with an exercise called a Prayer of Examine. This is a chance for you to respond to what God has been telling you today. A chance to pause before we rush back out into the world. I'll put some questions on the screen and give you time to reflect prayerfully on them. After a few minutes, I'll close us in a prayer for all of us.

1. When in the last week have you invested your life in God's new way?
2. When in the last week have you invested your life in other pursuits?
3. When in the next week will you be tempted to waste your life on worthless pursuits?
4. How can you invest your life in God's kingdom this week?