

## HIDDEN TREASURE

This morning we don't have to look very hard to find things that tell us in no uncertain terms that our world is in a mess, and that religion is in a mess. It's all over the news and everywhere we look today. But rather than talking about things that are temporal, I want us to spend the next hour discussing things that are eternal, because all the negative things going on in the world today aren't going to last much longer, but the eternal world will be here for a very long time, and even then it will be only the beginning.

When I was grade school age, I used to have fantasies about finding hidden treasure. I don't know if any of you have had such fantasies, but I did. I can't remember what prompted these fantasies: maybe it was a story I read, or a pirate movie I watched growing up, but my friend and I used to spend hours digging holes out in the fields and into the banks of what we called The Big Ditch. Back then I don't think there were such things as metal detectors like people use today when searching for coins or other valuables hidden in the earth, that would have made things much easier and more exciting I suppose, but we had a good time nonetheless. In fact, sometimes we would play hooky from school and spend the whole day indulging in this favorite activity.

Now, if there are any children listening today, please don't follow my example in this. I didn't know Jesus back then and it was wrong of me to ditch school, and my grades suffered because of it, and so did my south side when my parents found out. So please don't do as I did or think you can get away with doing something similar, because when you do these kind of things you're really only hurting yourself besides disappointing your parents.

As my friend and I dug around, I can't ever remember finding anything of great value, but what fun we had pretending we were treasure hunters and what kinds of things we were going to do and buy once we struck it rich.

Well, evidently this kind of thing must have also been a favorite pastime of many people thousands of years ago, because Jesus used the illustration of hidden treasure in one of His parables. In ancient times it was customary for men to hide their treasures in the earth, because there was no such thing as safety deposit boxes at the local Wells Fargo Bank back then, and in order to keep from being robbed or to pay a heavy tax on expensive items, people endeavored to secretly preserve their wealth by concealing it, and the earth was looked upon as a safe hiding place.

However, there were a few problems with this, because sometimes people would forget where they buried it, that's probably what would happen to me, because the older I get the more difficult it is to remember important things. The other problem was that a person who hid their treasure might die and leave no treasure map, or maybe a new ruling power would come in and people would be thrown in prison or exiled to another place and be separated from their treasure, probably hoping some day to retrieve it, but most of the time that didn't happen. And

of course, when any of these things happened it was the good fortune of the one who would stumble across these hidden treasures.

In Christ's day it wasn't uncommon to discover, in neglected fields, old coins and ornaments of gold and silver that had been buried in the earth when the land was plowed in preparation to plant a crop. And so it was in this kind of atmosphere that Jesus told the parable recorded in **Matthew 13:44**. It's only one verse, but there's a lot here when you read between the lines.

**Matthew 13:44.** Jesus had just got done telling several other parables about the sower, the wheat and tares, the mustard seed, and the leaven, and in **Matthew 13:44** He said, *"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hides, and for joy thereof goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field."*

Now let's think about this parable for a minute. Jesus said, *"The kingdom of heaven is like unto."* In other words, there's something about this parable that explains the type of experience or the process we must go through in order to make it to the kingdom of heaven. Does that make sense? Whenever Jesus began a parable this way, that's what He meant. There's something about this parable we must understand in order to reach the heavenly shore.

Now think about what this man in the parable had to go through in order to obtain his treasure. Evidently he was hired to plow this field; because it didn't belong to him, that's why he had to buy it. And so he was probably walking behind his oxen and was plowing the soil deep, when all of a sudden the plow hits something and he nearly trips over what he thinks is a rock or an old tree root or something. So he stops his oxen and gets down on his hands and knees, and pushes the dirt away from this object only to discover that it's someone's long lost treasure, and as he takes a peek inside this box or bag or whatever it was in, he can hardly believe his eyes when he see that this treasure is far more valuable than everything he owns.

So he carefully covers up the treasure with dirt before anyone notices, marks the spot well, and returns to his home as quickly as he can and sells everything he has in order to purchase the field. He sells his house, his livestock, his clothes, his furniture, his wife's things, and his children's toys; he sells everything until there's nothing left to sell.

About this time his family and his neighbors begin to think that he has completely lost his mind. But paying them no mind he hurries off to the landowner, and to his surprise he discovers that the asking price for the field is exactly the amount he has, and it's a good thing because he couldn't raise another penny even if his life depended on it. He doesn't bother to counter offer for fear he'll lose the opportunity of a lifetime, so he gladly pays the money and becomes the proud owner of a new field.

With the deal closed, he hurries back home, and with the deed in his hand, he waves this piece

of paper up and down as he excitedly invites his family and all who will follow, to come and see his newly purchased field. And as the party arrives, guess what? They look upon the old neglected field and see no value in it at all, and now their first suspicions are confirmed, they are certain he has lost his marbles, and one by one they turn and leave this poor deluded soul before he has an opportunity to show everyone his hidden treasure and the reason he was so desperate to purchase the field.

In ***Christ's Object Lessons, page 104*** it says, "The field containing the treasure represents the Holy Scriptures. And the gospel is its treasure."

I can remember like it was yesterday when I discovered, in the Holy Scriptures, a gospel and a Jesus that was willing to forgive all my past sins, give me the privilege of becoming His child, to grant me eternal life, and to offer me a place in His everlasting kingdom. And I'll tell you friends, when I discovered that treasure, I was willing to give up everything in order to gain that treasure that was hidden in the field, because what were any of these things I had or the sins I enjoyed compared to the heavenly treasure?

I gladly gave them up, and in the process became like a madman to my friends and family. I waved my title to heaven up and down in my hand and invited all who would listen, to come and cast their eyes upon my treasure. But to my dismay, one by one they turned away because they saw no value in an old neglected field.

***Christ's Object Lessons, page 104*** continues by saying, "The treasures of the gospel are said to be hidden. By those who are wise in their own estimation, who are puffed up by the teaching of vain philosophy, the beauty and power and mystery of the plan of redemption are not perceived. Many have eyes, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not; they have intellect, but they discern not the hidden treasure."

You know, many people today pass right over the place where the treasure is concealed without even realizing it. It's as if they sit down and rest at the foot of an old tree and not know of the riches hidden at its roots; they might spread out a blanket and have a picnic and not realize that the real food is just below the surface where they lay. That's the way it is with many people today when it comes to the treasure hidden in God's word, and unfortunately that's the way it was with the Jews many years ago and that's the way it still is today.

As a golden treasure chest full of precious jewels, truth had been entrusted to the Hebrew people. In all the types and symbols of the earthly sanctuary the truths of redemption were revealed, yet when Christ came, they didn't recognize Him as the One to whom all the symbols pointed. They had the word of God in their hands, but their traditions hid from them the truth as it is in Jesus. The treasure house of all knowledge was open to them, and they didn't even know

it, and there's something we ought to learn from all this, after all, the apostle Paul says the things the Jews suffered were *"written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come."* [1 Corinthians 10:11]

And one of the lessons we need to learn is that God does not conceal His truth from anyone! By our own course of action we make it obscure to ourselves. Christ gave the Jewish people plenty of evidence that He was the Messiah, and many of the leaders knew that He was who He claimed to be, and yet they rejected Him. That is unfathomable to me! The problem was, Jesus' teachings called for change in their lives, and they didn't want to change. They didn't want to give up their cherished idols, their traditions, and their selfish ungodly practices. Therefore, they refused to admit to the clearest evidence God could give to establish their faith in Christ. Do you suppose it's any different today with the majority of people? Unfortunately no.

The apostle John tells us plainly what the real problem was. In **John 12:42, 43** he says, *"Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be (what?) put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."*

And it's really not much different within Adventism today, is it? Or within many of the other denominations for that matter. There are people today who know that things are not right within their beloved church; they know what the truth is, but they reject it because they want to continue to have social times with their friends, or perhaps they want to keep their position in the church, or because of family ties, or because of a hundred different things, and they choose to stay where they are when they know in their hearts it's wrong to do so.

Many of the chief rulers were absolutely convinced that Jesus was the Son of God, but His teachings were out of harmony with their own selfish ambitions. Even though they believed, they didn't have the faith that would secure the heavenly treasure because they were seeking worldly treasure or some hoped for position instead. And of course we can fall into the same trap today if we're not paying close attention to what's going on around us.

When Jesus was here on earth, His whole object was to fix people's eyes on eternal realities as opposed to being absorbed in worldly pursuits. And even His own disciples were not immune to the temptation of losing sight of the heavenly treasure. And so, Jesus told them something very important in **Matt. 16:24-26**:

*"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it (in other words, if we want to follow Jesus, we must say no to the things we want to do and say yes to the things He wants us to do): and whosoever will lose his life (or whosoever is willing to forget self) for my*

*sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

Here Jesus presents before us a much better world than the current one, correct? A much better treasure than we could ever find here, no matter how hard we work or how long we search. We read earlier that the field represents the Holy Scriptures, and the treasure we find within that field is the gospel. That means that everything we find in the Bible is good news! Everything inside the treasure chest points to Christ as the way of salvation. And if we would go after the gospel at least as aggressively as a man who goes after hidden treasure, we would find a joy that surpasses even the one who finds a fortune in tangible assets.

***Christ's Object Lessons, page 109*** says, "The word of God is to be our study. . . It is an inexhaustible treasure; but men fail to find this treasure (**the gospel**) because they do not search until it is within their possession."

You know, there are millions of people today who have owned the field for years, just like the man that sold it because they never found the treasure, or because they were too lazy to dig. You know what I mean? Countless millions have a Bible, they own the field, but they have never experienced the joys of salvation because they have never dug deep enough to find it, or they have left that task for the pastor to do for them, but it doesn't work that way! One cannot eat for another because there's no nourishment in it. The hidden treasure must be dug out by you if you're going to benefit from it.

The Bible says, There are some who are ever learning but never coming to a knowledge of the truth, and Jesus is the truth; He's the treasure! And then there are some who have plowed the field and have found the treasure but for various reasons have put it back in the hole and covered it up with good intentions to return, but they get side tracked on their way home by other interests.

And you know what? We can do this by neglecting our devotional time, and we can do the same thing by searching the field for wrong reasons; perhaps just to win an argument. We can do it by not obeying what the scriptures teach. We can do it by becoming involved in fanaticism and extremes. We can do it because we're too proud to put away preconceived ideas when we see that they're wrong. We can do it by making a test out of something that's not a test. We can do it by thinking there's a better treasure somewhere other than in the old neglected field. And when any of these kinds of things begin to take place, pretty soon we forget where the real treasure is buried. And it may take many sorrowful days of searching to find the true gospel of Christ once again.

In ***The Desire of Ages, page 83*** it says, "If Joseph and Mary had stayed their minds upon God by

meditation and prayer, they would have realized the sacredness of their trust, and would not have lost sight of Jesus. By one days neglect they lost the Saviour; but it cost them three days of anxious search to find Him. So with us; by idle talk, evilspeaking, or neglect of prayer, we may in one day lose the Saviour's presence, and it may take many days of sorrowful search to find Him, and regain the peace that we have lost." And guess what, if we lose Jesus, we lose eternal life. And so it's essential that we find Him once again.

I know by sad experience that this is absolutely true, because it has happened to me a couple times over the past 43 years since I first found the hidden treasure in the field. How is it with you, friend? Have you also had this sad experience? Have you lost the Saviour? I read a sign one time that said, "If God seems far away, who moved?" I can tell you that we are the ones who moved, because God can always be found in the same place. The field is the same and the treasure is always there to discover, but we have to put forth some effort.

If we don't find Christ in the field, we have lost the hidden treasure. And if we don't find the treasure once again, we won't find freedom from sin; and if we don't find freedom from sin, we won't find joy and peace; and if we don't find joy and peace, what do we have to offer those who don't know about the hidden treasure?

Look, I'm not just preaching to you this morning, but I'm preaching to myself as well. I need to take a shovel and dig in the field every day, and I need to communicate with the One who has placed the treasure there in the earth for me to find.

You know, I've thought about this many times. Why is it so difficult for us to take the time to study and pray when we know that this is the way to the heavenly kingdom? Why is it so hard to spend time with God so we can be ready to meet Jesus when He comes? Why is it not easy to get better acquainted with the One who died for us so we can be set free from sin? It's because dear friends, we have a fallen human nature that wants to do its own thing. It's because we're not naturally willing to lose our lives so we can find it in Christ. It's because we are programmed by sin to do what is contrary to the inclination of the divine nature.

When you think of plowing a field and getting down in the dirt to secure the treasure you've unearthed, it takes some work, doesn't it? It takes some sweating in order to bring it to the surface. There have been many times in the past when I felt like I would rather pursue other interests than go digging in the field, I'll be honest with you, but when I don't allow my feelings to get in the way I go digging anyway, even though I didn't want to at the time, and I'm always thankful afterwards that I got my priorities straight and went seeking for the treasure before I went pursuing other less important things. We've got to take the time to become master treasure hunters if we would become rich in spiritual things.

Before we close, I'd like to consider two other vital points about treasure hunting. Those who dig holes in fields must have a measure of faith that results in action, because "*faith without works is (what?) dead.*" If you didn't believe there might be treasure to find, why would you dig? Or if you were plowing a field and inadvertently unearthed a treasure, as in the parable, you must have faith to believe that it's worth more than you already possess. Else you wouldn't be willing to sell all you have to buy it.

***Signs of the Times, May 22, 1884*** says, "Faith is the gift of God, but the power to exercise it is ours. If faith lies dormant, it is no advantage to us; but in exercise, it holds all blessings in its grasp."

You can have all the faith in the world, but if you don't stick the shovel in the ground the treasure will stay hidden, won't it? Digging is hard work, but the reward is well worth the effort, and it's something we must do if we would realize its worth.

The other vital point is that the treasure won't be discerned or appreciated as the valuable thing it is unless the Holy Spirit opens our eyes. When the treasure is in a dark hole and you lift the lid on the treasure chest, you need the light of the Holy Spirit to shine upon it or you won't be able to see and appreciate the treasure. But once the Spirit shines a light upon it, you will at once be dazzled by the beauty of it, and you will realize that nothing in this world can hold a candle to it.

This is what the apostle Paul found and testifies to in **Phil. 3:7-9** where he says, "*But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*"

And Solomon found the same thing to be true. In **Proverbs 2:3-5** he says this, "*Yea, if you cry after knowledge, and lift up your voice for understanding; if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures; then you shall understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.*"

That is a promise, and I hope this is your earnest desire this morning, and if it is, then the promise of God is that you will find the hidden treasure that will make you wise unto salvation. Jesus said, "*The kingdom of heaven is like unto hid treasure in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hides, and for joy thereof goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field.*"

This is the process we must go through in order to make it to the kingdom of heaven, and I hope you have already found the treasure, but just know that there is more treasure to be found; there's more treasure the deeper we dig. And so, we shouldn't be satisfied with the first layer we

uncover, there's always more to find, and if we don't continue to find, we can become complacent with our first find and come to think it's not as valuable as we once thought. Don't let this happen to you.