

Becoming God's People III: Being God's Treasure

*You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, **then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.** Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites. – Exodus 19:4-6*

God was introducing Israel to a new paradigm. Basically, everything about their life, their purpose, their worth was going to change. God started the change with a change in their calendar:

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year." – Exodus 12:1-2

Following this He began to redefine who Israel was and who they would be. It was important for Israel to adopt this new identity, value system and way of thinking, because God was not looking to have a people just like all others. God wanted to use Israel to point the way to a better life, and as such, *they had to believe it themselves*, and not only that – they had to walk in it.

Years later, Jesus was teaching in the temple, handling the confrontation of the religious leaders.

Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him. To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever." – John 8:30-35

The Jews who believed in him also believed that they were free, but Jesus showed them a deeper truth – they weren't walking in true freedom. There were things in their lives that kept them bound, even though from what they could see, they were as free as they needed to be. In reality, their freedom was based on their understanding of freedom, and how they compared their state with others. *We have never been slaves of anyone.* This was coming from a nation who was at that time under Roman rule.

As Jesus defined what real freedom was for those who believed him, God also had to redefine many ideas Israel had about life: submission, obedience, faith, purpose, possession and value. God is also doing the same with us, defining and redefining our lives and bringing us into that understanding so we can walk in His truth.

Stating the Obvious

“Treasure” is not a concept that normally needs a lot of explanation. Things of value, things that will benefit us or just things that will please us are treasures to us. Supply and Demand is based on this fact, that regardless of the actual net worth of a product, if there is enough demand for it, its value, or “treasure equivalent” skyrockets. Stores create artificial or perceived demand to further validate our “need for that treasure”. Treasures make us happy, they fulfill us, they give us self worth.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and, 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 has been preaching about a kingdom that he is inviting people to enter. In the parables, he is describing how the kingdom works. Following one parable, Jesus explains who the “players” are in the parable:

The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age and the harvesters are angels. – Matthew 13:37-39

So the parables are more than just nice stories – they speak of spiritual realities that we are able to enter into, when we understand how the kingdom is demonstrated in other areas of scripture.

New Found Treasure

In the parable, Jesus describes the actions of two men. Each of the men came upon their treasure in very different ways, but the result was the same. The first man stumbled upon something that was immediately recognized as **prized**. The treasure was hidden, and by the nature of the parable, was either unknown or forgotten by the owner of the field. To think of all the times the owner cared for the field, maybe planted crops or used it for grazing his animals, daily overlooking something of extreme worth that could have been discovered with some effort. This treasure could have also affected the area of the field negatively, causing it not to produce. In any case, when the man found the treasure, he knew it was to be **preferred** above anything else the man had. The man now had one focus: get the treasure.

*Treasures are:
Prized
Preferred
Pursued*

The second man’s focus was different. He was in **pursuit** of a particular treasure, and was meticulous until he found it. Once he found it, he was **persistent** in his efforts, selling everything until he could buy the treasure.

As a parable of the kingdom of heaven, you can see how God is when it comes to his treasure:

Prized	Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says “rejoice with me, I have found my lost sheep” – Luke 15: 4-6
Preferred	I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. – Luke 15:7
Pursued	You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us

Israel was just coming out of a lifestyle of torture, abuse, forced possession and no value. In Egypt they were not prized, they were used. They were not preferred - they were pushed aside. And the only pursuit of them was if they tried to get away. God wanted them to know a new life that would come with the covenant – a life where they could begin to feel real worth and purpose.

King of the Hill

God spoke of Israel as being his treasured possession. In this it was understood that Israel was prized. God went so far as to say that while the whole earth was His, Israel would have a special place and significance. Fast-forward to Jesus’ interaction with those who believed in him and you can see what this turned into: *We are Abraham’s descendants...* this became a badge to be worn, a sense of entitlement and almost a statement to the world that they were “God’s favorite”.

*Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed **about himself**: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.” But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. – Luke 18:10-14*

Being special does not mean being better. Being set apart is not to be a sign of status. Being called is not an avenue to condemn. Jesus said that the tax collector went home justified (not just *feeling better about himself*, but having been made right by God), where the Pharisee received nothing. This man was a **treasure that was stumbled upon**, that God declared his worth, preferred him over the Pharisee and

pursued him to establish righteousness in him. The key for this man, and what caused the change in his life, was the pursuit of God, not his own self worth. In fact, it was only by the pursuit of God, by God declaring him to be a treasured possession that his life did change. So it is for us, when we allow God to declare how He values us, what our place is in his kingdom, we are changed by the value he places on us, and our desire is to continue to change to fully become the person he has already said we could be.

This My Son

Jesus continued, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs." – Luke 15:11-16

This story can actually go by many titles. The biggest focus is on the younger son, of course, because of all that he does wrong and how the father restores him. The story however is nothing without the father. The father had every reason to disown his son, to not allow him back, to agree to his son's terms, make him a slave and make him pay everything back. The father however saw a prized possession. When the son returned home the father **pursued the son to bring him back to the position he was meant to be in**. The father **preferred the company** of his son to the separation he felt when the son left. Before the son entered the new life that he thought he would be experiencing, the father began to order the son's life, declaring the value he had in the son:

*But the father said **to his servants**, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For **this son of mine** was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate. – Luke 15:22-24*

The father didn't just utter an empty value statement. He followed it up with actions that fit the statement. He didn't just talk about making the son feel special and wanted, he backed it up. As this is a parable, it can also be applied to other areas where God pursues His people: *you will be my treasured possession* is not just a statement but the basis for all of God's actions toward us after that. It is God breaking out the best robe (remember the significance of the robe in covenant), marshaling all of his servants to prepare the banquet, bringing the **fattened calf** (do you get the impression that the father "sold everything" in preparation of finding his treasured possession?).

For us, when God declares us as His children, as His valued, treasured possession, it is not an empty show of words. We can expect a show of his love as demonstration of the declaration.

Being Like the Father

There is another son in the story. He doesn't leave. He doesn't ask for the inheritance. He is living in the father's presence, but does not experience the father's value. This son has it hard because he is living, not through the father, but through the experiences of his brother:

*But he answered his father, "Look! All these years I've been **slaving** for you and never disobeyed **your orders**. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with **my friends**. But when this son of yours **who has squandered your property with prostitutes** comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him." "My son", the father said, "**you are always with me and everything I have is yours**. But **we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.**" – Luke 15:29-32*

The older brother never heard the value the father had in him. Consequently, he judged his life, not by the constant connection he could have had with his father, but with the life that he saw in his brother. *Thank you God that I am not like this man...* The father had to show the older son that he was **also preferred**; that he also had value, and that he was to be like his father in his joy over his brother returning. When God declared his value over Israel, his goal was to make a people that had his heart – a people that would not just occupy the Promised Land, but would be the image of the heart of God for the rest of the nations. God does the same with us, not only declaring his love and value over us, but transforms us into the image of His Son, so we can show His heart to the world.