

A treasure you'll do anything to have . . .

Matthew 13:44

[note: there are a couple of opening questions here. Choose one. Don't let these take up all of your time. Keep it moving ☺]

Q If your house was on fire, and you could only take one single possession with you, what would you take?

Q Often today we use the word "treasure" as a verb. For example: "I treasure sleeping in on Saturday morning." What would you say that you "treasure"?

Explore the Text

Read Matthew 13:44 (or, read 13:44-46)

Q In this short little verse we are told a remarkable amount of information about the man and about how he viewed his treasure. What are some of the things you observe about the man and his treasure?

Q This story would read great if you left out the phrase "in his joy." What does this add to the story?

Q How does the word "should" work in this story? [the word "should" is not there. The concept of "should" doesn't fit with treasure. The man didn't bury the treasure and go to all the trouble to buy the field because he SHOULD. He did it because he valued it so much.]

Q So, what's the point about the kingdom of heaven? [When one clearly sees the kingdom, and the king, they are of such unimaginable value that one will joyfully do anything to secure that treasure. Furthermore, when one has this treasure it is a "deal," – something to be celebrated]. [note: this is where you summarize the text.]

F/C

Q How do you emotionally respond to this man? Can you relate to him? Do you wish you were like him? (in this devotional this is where the F/C comes in. They most likely are sad, wishing they were more like this man)

F/C The reality is that our excitement about the Kingdom (the Lord) is often lagging because we don't treasure it like we do other things.

Connect hearts and F/C to Christ

The solution to our waning excitement about Christ is that we need to be convinced of his greatness, beauty, and ability to satisfy us. The solution is NOT to suck it up, saying that we SHOULD treasure him more. The solution is to gaze upon him and allow his greatness and beauty to woo us.

One way to do this is to talk amongst ourselves of the greatness of Christ.

Toast

1. Explain how the toast works. Everyone pretends they have a mug (of root beer ☺.) The person leading the toast raises her mug and says, "Jesus, I toast you. You are the treasure beyond all other treasures to me because you . . ." Everyone else raises their mugs to say "here, here!" It might take a little encouragement to get this going. People can toast more than once if they want.
2. Encourage people to use first person pronouns. You don't want people to say "Jesus. I toast you because you are sovereign." It would be better to say, "Jesus. You are a treasure beyond all other treasures to me because you are the Father I never had."
3. You go first. Set the example. Be vulnerable. Be heart-felt. You are toasting Christ for why he is a treasure beyond all treasures to you. Start the toast off well.

Whitewashed tombs
Matthew 23:25-28

Matthew 23 contains 7 “woes” to the Pharisees.

Read Matthew 23:25-28

I. Launch – get them to own the F/C

Q Which are you most concerned with . . . your outward appearance or the inner realities of your life? (affections, thinking, etc.)

Q Why is this the case?

Q How do you feel about this being the case?

II. Explore

Q Look at the first woe. What did the Pharisees do? What, according to Jesus, should they have done first? Why?

Q The second woe is a simile. What is compared to what? Do you think this is a outlandish simile, or does it strike you as being dead on? Why?

III. Apply – tie F/C and hearts to Christ

Q What are some of the ramifications of being a person who is more committed to outward appearance than inner realities? [push hard on this. You will be addicted to people. You will be more committed to what others think than what you do. You will compromise on the gospel. You will not see your need for the gospel (anyone can look good in a Christian group). Your experiences of inner joy and peace will be tied to externals. People won't enjoy being around you as much as if you were yourself. If you focused on inner realities, you would get external change; if you do it the other way, you will never change your inner being. Your love for God will be minimal, as transformation takes place through forgiveness, etc.]

Q What is it about Jesus that perhaps encourages you to be honest about your inner realities with him? As a group, make the case for why anyone should want to bring their inner realities to Christ, but do this by collecting a bunch of “I” statements. It's sort of like verbal processing. “Jesus. I think I should be more honest with you about my inner struggles because it would feel great just to tell someone about them.” “Jesus. I need to be more honest about my inner life because I need help changing it.” Etc.

Q How does the gospel speak to these particular woes?

Pray. Give folks a few moments to bring their inner realities to Christ. Pray that we would be people, and a movement, that is known by transformed hearts and not external image maintenance.

A very present help in trouble

Psalm 46: 1-3, 10-11

I. Launch – get them to own the F/C

Q When you are frazzled and “stressed out” . . . when your life seems most overwhelming or unmanageable, what are some ways you cope?

Could some of you share either a recent time this happened, or just the general way you tend to respond when these times come up? [it would help if you set the tone by being vulnerable]

Q What are some of the underlying beliefs behind these behaviors? In other words, WHY do you try these things? [I think here we are trying to help people see that they run to what they think will work. Do they run to God?. Again, confess your own folly.]

F/C Being overwhelmed, at times, seems part of being human. Who, or what, we turn to, in these times says a great deal about how we view the Lord. Quite often we run to something other than God.

II. Explore

Read Psalm 46: 1-3

Verse 2-3 paint a picture of an incredible time of stress: “the earth gives way,” the “mountains tremble,” etc. It’s about as catastrophic as it can get. It is this backdrop for verse 1.

Write “God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble”

on the white board.

I would first make the observation that this first stanza is a couplet – two parallel statements (this will help them learn a little about poetry. Sometimes the second line restates the first line, or says the opposite of the first line, or augments, or complements the first line. That’s the case here.)

Q How does the second line complement the first? What does it add to the first line?

Q How would you describe the difference between “refuge” and “strength”?

Q How do you need BOTH in times when you are pressed?

Q Let’s paint a picture of God as a “refuge.” Complete this statement as a group. “God, you are an unbelievable refuge because you _____ . . .”

The psalmist opens with the statement "God is our refuge and strength." He ends the psalm with these verses, 10-11.

Read 46: 10-11.

Q At the end of the psalm, the psalmist concludes with a conceptual bookend. The words in verses 10-11 aren't the same as the words in verse 1. But they certainly complement/complete what the psalmist began in verse 1. **How do verses 10-11 help complete or flesh out verse 1: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble"?**

For example (you don't need to ask all of these!). I would have them open their Bibles to verse 10-11, and compare it with what is on the board (verse 1).

How does "be still" relate to "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble"? [we can be still in times of great stress BECAUSE God is our refuge and strength]

How does the surety of God's victory complement "God is our refuge and strength"? [What good is a refuge and strength that might not win?]

How does the repeated theme in vs 11 "The Lord of hosts is WITH US" complement "God is our refuge and strength"?

How does the language of "fortress" complement "God is our refuge and strength"?

III. Apply – tie F/C and hearts to Christ

(maybe a comment on how Jesus takes Ps 46:1 to new levels. A greater "refuge" – we have his presence with the Spirit. A greater "strength" -- the resurrection.)

Return to F/C: When we are stressed, we need a clearer picture of God as our refuge and strength. When we see him this way, we will run to him for refuge and strength. When we run elsewhere, we get what we looked at in 1 Sam 12 – something that will not deliver.

1. Take time for some quiet personal reflection. There is likely some situation, or a collection of circumstances, that is causing you great duress. Take a few moments to affirm Ps 46:1 as it relates to your situation. "Lord. You are my refuge. I run to you. Lord. You are my strength. Lord. You are a very present help for me, right now."

2. Leader close in prayer – confessing that we run to other people and things, affirming that the Lord of hosts is with us, affirming that GOD is our refuge, affirming that GOD is our strength, calling on us to be still, etc.

When goodness and loving kindness appear . . .
Titus 3: 4-7

I. Launch – get them to own the F/C

Q Tell me about a time when you feel like you were ripped off. Not about a time when you had something stolen, but a time when you didn't get a fair share, or perhaps a time when someone else received something that you thought should have been yours, or perhaps a time when someone received accolades that should have been yours.

The feeling of being "dissed" is a very powerful emotion. We have such a strong demand to get what we think we deserve. If someone crosses us, we are furious.

So, we bring this to God. Sometimes we feel like we have been "dissed" by God. More often, however, we believe the corollary of this. If we believe that God can "diss" that is, not give us our due, then it means that God is a God who rewards us according to our merits.

F/C We think God is a God who rewards our merits and that we can make God our debtor. "God . . . you owe me for . . ." Or course, we are good CCC'ers. We never SAY that. But we think it. Many times, every day, it's easy to slip into this idea that God will deal with me according to something I've done.

Q What are some ways that we do this?

Or . . .

Q Have you ever been the recipient of some sort of unmerited kindness? Perhaps a situation when you didn't deserve this expression of kindness – you had done nothing to merit it. Or, perhaps even a situation when you had done plenty to NOT deserve this expression of kindness, yet it came anyway?

Can you tell us about it? How did you feel? Respond?

F/C Unmerited expressions of generosity are rare in our world, and if we are so fortunate to experience these, they really get our attention. We are so fiercely committed to 1) demanding what we deserve and 2) giving people what they deserve (and no more!), and 3) getting mad at people who don't give people what they deserve and 4) convincing ourselves that we, of all people, always give people what they deserve, that it dulls us to the concept of unmerited kindness.

II. and III. Explore the passage and Apply – tie hearts and F/C to Christ (for the sake of brevity, I am doing both of these together as I go through the passage).

A. Have someone read Titus 3:4-7

I want to focus on 2 key phrases in this great little passage. The first is verse 4:

B. **Q** The phrase “when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared” is powerful. What a beautiful way to announce Christ! **When did the “goodness and loving kindness of God” first appear to you? Tell us about what it was like when you first saw the “goodness and loving kindness of God.”** [note: we’re not looking for “when I was 10.” I’m looking for them to tell me what it was like to first experience the goodness and loving kindness of God. Don’t let them off with a canned testimony ☺]

Q How has the “goodness and loving kindness of God” been appearing to you lately? Today? Last week? Be specific. [here I am trying to push that the gospel was not for ‘back then.’ We experience the gospel every day, all day long.]

C. The second little phrase I want to look at is the first part of verse 5 (to the word “mercy”):

Q Paul writes that God saved us NOT because of works of righteousness. **What are the most righteous deeds you have produced (and continue to produce each day!) that you subtly might believe could cause God to be a debtor to you . . . to owe you something? Come on. Be honest.**

Those don’t work. The text says so. God saved us, NOT because of works DONE IN RIGHTEOUSNESS. Your most righteous deeds do not work.

Q Note the contrast of pronouns in verse 5. “ **HE** saved us, not because of works done by **US** in righteousness, but according to **HIS OWN** mercy.” We offer our works. They look like the list in Titus 3:3. Our contribution to salvation is corrupted “works” that don’t work. He offers HIS MERCY. Our great hope is his own mercy. **Q Describe what happens in your heart when you encounter this mercy.**

Lead a time of confession, specifically confessing the things we do that we think can make God our debtor.

Lead a time of thanksgiving, glorying in the reality that, due to the appearing of the loving kindness of God, every day, all day, our lives have mercy poured all over them.

Our pursuit of things that cannot deliver

1 Samuel 12:19-22

I. Expose F/C

Q Can anyone share an experience or relationship that didn't deliver what it appeared to promise? Perhaps you had great hopes for a product, or an experience, or a relationship that ended up empty. How did you feel after this experience?

F/C Inevitably we pursue what we think will satisfy us. In fact, we desperately pursue things and people that we think can deliver life to us. They don't work. Well, they work enough to keep us chasing them. But each of us can tell a string of stories – it doesn't work. *We abandon God to pursue other things.*

In a speech in 1 Samuel 12, Samuel gives us some remarkable insight into this obsession we have – pursuing things and people that cannot satisfy.

II. Explore the passage

Have someone read 1 Sam 12:19-22

Overview the passage: There are 3 “do not” statements given to Israel, followed by an explanation about WHY they should not do these things. Let's look at them.

A. Consider the first “do not” statement in verse 20a: **Do not** be afraid; you have done all of this evil.

Q What strikes you as odd about this statement? (answer: If I have done all this evil, why shouldn't I be afraid. I would expect “Don't be afraid; you haven't done too much evil.” Samuel tells it like it is: You HAVE done all this evil. BUT . . . do not be afraid).

Q How do you think Samuel can hold these two ideas together . . . that they've done this great evil and that they should not fear?

Q We might be prematurely looking ahead, but how does this first “do not” statement remind you of the gospel? (this shows so much about God and the gospel)

B. Consider the second and third “do not” statements (20b, 21): “Yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty.” (there is a parallel in Jeremiah 2:5)

Q How are the second and third “do not” statements related? (answer: they are like two sides of one coin. If you turn aside from following the Lord you HAVE turned aside after empty things)

Q If these are two sides of one coin, why did Samuel add the last “do not” statement? (answer: we need to be reminded that things other than the Lord ultimately are empty and cannot deliver. Why are we slow to learn?!)

III. Tie F/C and hearts to Christ

These 3 “do not” statements . . . do not fear . . . do not turn aside from following the Lord . . . do not turn aside after worthless things are grounded in the reason given in verse 22.

“For the Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name’s sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself.”

There are 2 main ideas here: 1. The Lord will not forsake. Why will the Lord never forsake?? 2. Because it *pleases* him to make us a people for himself.

Q How does your heart respond to what is said about the Lord in verse 12:22? Read it with personal pronouns . . . “For the Lord will not forsake ME, for his great name’s sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make ME a people for himself.” [It is the kindness of God that leads us to repentance. It is the assurance that God is for us that prompts us to not turn aside to pursue what will not deliver, but to instead wholeheartedly follow this amazing, grace filled, God. I wouldn’t take the time to go there, but in Hebrews 13:1-6, the rationale that “God won’t forsake me” and that the “Lord is my helper” is at the heart of commands about being content, living free of the love of money, and living a sexually pure life.]

How does this remarkable statement ground the 3 “do not” statements?

Q. How might verse 22 explain why you should not be afraid when you have committed evil? [In order to make us a people for himself, the Lord had to provide a solution for all our evil. His commitment to make us his people was, in part, the motivation to provide his Son. Jesus was always saying “Fear not.” He knows we need this reassurance, especially in light of our sin.]

Q. How does the truth “the Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name’s sake, because it has PLEASED the Lord to make you a people FOR HIMSELF” incline your heart to abandon the pursuit of things that can deliver or satisfy and run to the Lord? [When we see his power, grace, and intentions they woo us to follow him. When we are disconnected from God enough so that everything else appears to be what might “deliver” or “work” in life, we will give our hearts and lives to those things. What we need is a steady dose of the face of Christ. We need to hear these great words every day: “It has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself.”]

Lead a time of confession in the group . . . of running after things other than him. Lead a time of affirmation . . . “Lord. I want to follow you with my whole heart . . . I want to believe that following other things or people will leave me empty.” (be specific).”