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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“KINGDOM URGENCY”
Matthew 13:44-46

☑ In the 1983 movie, “A Christmas Story,” 9 year-old Ralphie Parker wants only one gift: **“an official Red Ryder carbine-action 200-shot range model air rifle with a compass in the stock.”**

Ralphie *dreams* of finding a Red Ryder under the tree. He *yearns* for it like a man sentenced to life w.o. parole yearns for freedom. He *craves* it like a poor soul stranded in the Sahara craves water.

Ralphie begs his mother for a Red Ryder; she answers, “No, you’ll shoot your eye out.” He writes an essay about the BB gun; his teacher gives him a C+ and adds, “P.S. You’ll shoot your eye out.” He asks a Marshall Field’s Santa for a Red Ryder; the man says, “You’ll shoot your eye out, kid. Mercy Christmas! Ho, ho, ho!”

On Christmas Ralphie does not see his dream gift, and is very disappointed. But his sorrow turns to joy when his father points out one last, half-hidden package.

At the end, we see Ralphie lying in bed on Christmas night, tenderly clutching his **“official Red Ryder carbine-action 200-shot range model air rifle with a compass in the stock.”** It was the best present he would ever receive.

The movie is not for children. The language is rough.

Still, Ralphie’s intense desire for an air rifle and the steps he actively takes in trying to get one set a worthy

standard for the passion with which we can strive to lay hold of the kingdom of God.

☐ Please turn to Matthew 13:44.

• Would someone read it? {TNIV} **“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.**

⇒ Christ’s focus is on the finder’s behavior. The man finds a treasure that is hidden, yet available, {Snodgrass} **“beyond compare and worth whatever is required to participate in it,”** so he does everything necessary to get hold of it.

☐^{a, b} Some people are bothered that the man does not report the treasure.

This was not an ethical dilemma for first century Jews. The rabbis decreed that {Baba Batra 4.8-9} **“If a man [sells] a field he has sold the stones, and the [vines] in a vineyard, and its [unharvested] crop”** (in short, everything on the property). They also declared, {Baba Mesi’a 25a} **“If a man [takes possession] of a found object for”** someone else, he is not obligated to give it to that person.

★ Besides, the story is not about found money. The point is that the kingdom of God {Snodgrass, 246} **“is present and awaiting recognition of its value and the radical action it deserves.”**

☐ Would someone read Matthew 23:45-46? {TNIV} **“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.”**

Again, the focus is on the merchant's behavior. The only difference between the two stories is that this man does not discover the treasure *accidentally*; he looks for it.

⇒ Notice that when he finds it, it is not a whole set of pearls; there is only one: the biggest, finest, purest pearl he ever imagined, his for the taking – {Wright} **“if [he’ll] sell everything else, including all the other pearls [he] ever owned, in order to purchase it.”**

☑ These parables {Wright} **“cut right across the idea ... that different [faiths and belief systems], and the experiences they offer, are like a set of pearls which you could collect. There is only one great pearl; there is only one hoard of treasure; and everything else is nothing beside it.”**

Oh, to have such urgency as these men! To pursue the kingdom of God as vigorously as they do!

Sometimes, I do. I love the kingdom. I want to embody and serve the kingdom. I usually mean it when I pray, **“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”**

☹ But sometimes I go through the motions, I hold back, I dip my feet into the kingdom instead of diving in. In those moments I act as though God's kingdom is just a place to go when I feel religious or I need a spiritual boost, a part-time refuge from real life in the kingdom of the world.

❖ Let's spotlight what are (at least for me) three of the worst obstacles to kingdom urgency, and three corresponding responses.

❶ One obstacle is Ακηδεια (*Latin: Acedia*), which is often translated *sloth* (that is, an “aversion to work or

exertion; laziness). Yet that translation is misleading, because ακηδεια reveals itself equally in lazy inactivity and hamster-on-a-wheel busyness. It can manifest itself in either extreme because it is more about the *why* of what we do than *what* we do.

The Greek term ακηδεια literally means *carelessness*. It is a fading spiritual appetite that weakens our desire for God, a creeping boredom that causes us to become self-obsessed, an evaporation of faith that makes the kingdom seem far away.

☑ Evagrius Ponticus described ακηδεια as a demon that makes us hate our **“place, life itself, and ... the work of [our] hands....”** We are especially vulnerable in {Clifton-Soderstrom} **“the middle of the day, the middle of the week, the middle of life—where task becomes tedium, vocation becomes vacuous, ritual becomes rut.”**

Wow! Can I ever identify! How about you?

✪ How can we overcome ακηδεια? By renewing our fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The kingdom is a social reality. It is all about relationship with God and other kingdom citizens.

The most potent writings about this come from monks who lived in the Egyptian desert. Ακηδεια was their fiercest temptation – not because of inactivity, but because of isolation. The longer they were alone, the worse the attacks became.

On the other hand, the more intimately and consistently we engage each other in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit the easier it is to overcome ακηδεια.

② Fear is another obstacle to kingdom urgency.

What if the treasure in the field turns out to be fool's gold? What if the pearl "**of great value**" is really a worthless fake? What if I surrender to Christ, only to discover that his kingdom is not what it is cracked up to be? What if it isn't worth the sacrifice?

(We should note that the characters in these parables are not actually making a sacrifice, since the treasure in the field and the one pearl of much greater worth than what they already possess. Still, we often perceive our surrender to Christ that way.)

✪ How can we overcome this fear? By remembering who God is and what God has done.

{*Definition*} ~ In Scripture, the word *remember* seldom refers to mere intellectual recall or nostalgic reminiscing. It is usually a decision to consider something and act accordingly.

☞ There are two components to remembering who the Lord is and what He has done: One is Bible study: Scripture reveals God's mighty deeds of the past, his unchanging love and power, and his promises for the future; the other is witness – not just telling how we initially came to Christ, but relating the good news of what the Lord is doing in and through us now.

The deeper we get into the Word and the more we share and hear a witness, the better we will remember and the easier it will be to overcome fear.

③ Distraction is another huge obstacle to kingdom urgency.

So many voices, activities, and opportunities clamor for our attention. Some are bad. Many are neutral. Others are good.

But even those that are morally and spiritually fine tend to distract me from that which is the best and of the highest priority: God and his kingdom.

At times, those distractions cause me to postpone essential kingdom action. The things of the world can seem to be more important in the present than the things of God's kingdom.

At times, those distractions cause me to temporarily forget my commitment. It isn't usually for long, but it is enough to get me caught up in other things for a while.

At times, those distractions blind me, and cause me to fail to recognize the Kingdom. For example, my desire for my family's earthly security or for the earthly success of Beverly Covenant sometimes makes me think I am working for the kingdom of God when I am really serving just another version of the kingdom of the world.

✪ How can we overcome distraction? By praying for open eyes and a focused mind.

(There is a lot of overlap in each response. Renewed fellowship, Bible study, and witness are all helpful tools in overcoming each of these obstacles.)

The Lord is good and powerful. He is able and eager to help us overcome the distractions that dull kingdom urgency.

“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.”

It is easy to lose urgency and approach God and his kingdom as if they distant, a bit unreal, or just another item to check off our to-do list.

They are not! The **“kingdom of God is present and awaiting recognition of its value and the radical action it deserves.”** Our participation in God’s kingdom is a matter of the highest priority and utmost urgency.