



## Congratulations! You Are Absolutely Guaranteed

Matthew 6:19-34; 13:44-46

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July 18, 2010

Prayer for Illumination (before Scripture reading)

*Mighty God, Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace, break the bread of your Word among us and nourish us with your truth. In the name of Christ Jesus we pray. Amen*

*Matthew 6:19-34...from The Message*

*“Congratulations! You are absolutely guaranteed to receive at least one of our top five fabulous premiums in USA ADVANTAGE’S National Advertising Promotion!! You must call within 72 hours or your premiums will pass to an alternate recipient. First prize is a luxurious Lexus SUV. No purchase necessary.*

Don’t you just love getting those promotional invites in the mail, over the telephone, or on the internet? I think that if I responded to every vacation home development promotion, or any of the myriad of other sales pitches without actually buying anything, I could probably collect some wonderful gifts for my home and my family.

But I have a sneaking feeling that I would be disappointed. Oh, to be honest, Ruth and I have responded on a few occasions, especially to the 45 minute time share presentations (that morph into an hour and a half!) And we have enjoyed a few good meals and tourist attractions for our time and effort. And, I must admit, my mom and dad did receive a very nice, small, portable TV one time through such a promotion. But, I’m a skeptic at heart!

As in the front page article on ‘New scams hit Green Valley’, in last Wednesday’s Green Valley News and Sun, “*If it’s too good to be true, it probably is.*” The article was about four different lottery and sweepstakes scams currently targeting local residents. I came across one email that read:

*“Congratulations, You are the Winner! Nvidia GTX 295X4 ATI STFU Limited Special Edition! Please claim your prize as soon as possible by email, and include the financial information requested...”*

I'm not inclined to believe that I would actually receive the Nvidia, whatever it is, nor would I likely receive the luxurious 2010 Lexus SUV, indicated in the first invite I read. In fact, I may find the offers to be dishonest scams—set to distance me from some of my money. It is amazing, isn't it, what we will go through, what we will do, in order to obtain something valuable, or something we believe to be valuable, something that we want? We trade our skills, our talents, our money, and our time for things we believe to be of worth. Every single day we commit ourselves and our lives to people, relationships, and responsibilities. And, to be sure, there are many things and people, relationships and responsibilities that are worthy of those trades—that are of greater value by far than the so-called awards or rewards offered in the mail or other-wise.

Among all the possibilities and invitations, there is, however, one thing that claims the place of most valuable, most precious. Jesus refers to it in today's text as "the Kingdom of Heaven". Having God in the central position in one's life, Jesus is saying, is of such phenomenal worth, it brings such deep joy, that absolutely everything else of value pales by comparison. The Kingdom is the greatest treasure, the most precious pearl.

It is, however, a treasure some people never find because they never seek it; which some never find because they search for it in the wrong places; and which some find but are unable to claim as their own because they shy away from the commitment necessary to place "seeking the Kingdom of Heaven" at the center of their lives. God laying claim to the position of "most valuable" can give us humans difficulty at times. There is, as we have noted, a lot of competition for that position! (See the cover of the bulletin for some examples.) And with so many concrete, touchable valuables all around us, it is all too easy to dismiss something seemingly as nebulous or abstract as "the Kingdom of Heaven" as unimportant, or at least not of primary importance.

I understand that there is a nursery in Canada which has a big sign on the wall as you enter, which reads: "The Best Time to Plant a Tree is Twenty-Five Years Ago." Then, underneath, in bigger letters, it says, "THE SECOND BEST TIME IS TODAY!"

We may wish we had already done a better job of seeking the Kingdom of Heaven in our life, but there is no time like the present, here in the middle of the summer of 2010, to make some new choices!

In order for the Kingdom of Heaven to stand in the 'most valuable' position in our lives, there must be the recognition that it is God who gives us life itself, who has given us all we have, through whom we have had the opportunity to become the people we are and hope to be. There must be the recognition that in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ God has offered us forgiveness for our sins, and healed the broken relationship between God and us. And there must be the recognition that nothing and no one is more worthy of standing at life's center than is the God who makes life possible.

But to truly experience the treasure of the Kingdom one must make the commitment of the man who found the buried treasure and sold all he had to buy the field where it was hidden; or of the pearl merchant who sold all he had to secure the one pearl of infinite value. The joy of the greatest treasure, the most precious pearl,

the Kingdom of Heaven, is experienced in all its fullness only when it stands where it belongs—at the center, not on the fringes, of one’s life.

But how does that happen? How do we treasure God’s ways in our life? Little by little. O, certainly, a relationship with Jesus Christ as one’s Lord and Savior is the foundation on which we build.

Worship, prayer, reading the Scriptures, sharing one’s faith, living as a forgiving, compassionate and understanding person, are all ways in which the Kingdom of Heaven comes alive in our lives. It is a journey, day by day, one step at a time. And right now, today, is an excellent time to take stock of your life, to consider your priorities, and choose some new habits or make some changes which will enable you to grow in faith and serve Jesus Christ in all you do. It has most to do with our personal walk with God, and yet, even in the summer-time our Christian Education program and other ministries offer numerous opportunities for all of us, with others, to grow in our faith and service. A brief scan of the bulletin, or the monthly Valley Voice newsletter and one discovers a multitude of options; from volunteering for the Galactic Blast Vacation Bible School, to various fellowship and study groups, to the Wednesday evening classes Pastor Diane will be offering beginning September 1, titled “Beginnings”, an introduction to the Christian faith.

The story is told of a wife’s correspondence with her husband who was serving time in prison for armed robbery. “When is the best time to plant the potatoes?” she inquired in a letter. The husband wrote back, “Don’t dig in the potato patch now. That’s where I hid all my guns.” The prison mail was censored, and soon the potato patch in question was being dug up by a whole squad of officers. But there were no guns to be found. Again, the wife wrote to her husband in prison. “They’ve dug up the whole potato patch,” she complained. Whereupon, the crafty husband wrote back, “The patch is ready. You can plant the potatoes now!”

“CONGRATULATIONS! You are absolutely guaranteed....” *that there is no time like the present to seek the Kingdom of Heaven, to plant your life in the soil of God’s marvelous love—*  
for the first time, or again---and see what happens!!

AMEN...and So Be It...as God has his way,  
in my life, and in yours!