

5. Parable of the Hidden Treasure and Pearl

Matthew 13:44-46

Warm-up Question: Knowing all that you know now, if there were no obstacles to stop you and unlimited resources available to you, what profession would you choose to enter and why?

⁴⁴“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. ⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it (Matthew 13:44-46).

In the two parables that we are looking into today, we read about two people who come across something of great value and what they do to secure their ownership of the treasure and the pearl. The first man unexpectedly stumbled onto the treasure; whereas, the other was a person seeking and searching for pearls. In both parables, a comparison is made to the kingdom of heaven. It is not the intent of this study to focus on just what is the kingdom of heaven, for that is a topic in itself; suffice it to say that the kingdom of God or heaven (the names are synonymous with one another in the Scriptures) is the rule and reign of God. When a person is brought into the kingdom of heaven, he or she is brought into right relationship with God through the finished work of Christ on the cross. Let’s take a look first at the treasure hidden in a field.

The Treasure Hidden in the Field

First of all, I want you to imagine what it would be like to stumble upon a buried treasure. It is the kind of thing that we imagine happening to adventurers or explorers, but it has happened to ordinary people just going about their business who are not expecting it. They were not looking for treasure.

On September 27, 2013, a French climber that was scaling a glacier off Mount Blanc stumbled across a treasure of emeralds, rubies and sapphires that had been buried for decades. It is thought that the box of jewelry worth US\$356,435 was on board an Indian plane that had crashed in the region in 1966. The climber turned in the haul to local police. "This was an honest young man who very quickly realized that they belonged to someone who died on the glacier," said local gendarmerie chief Sylvain Merly. "He could have kept them, but he preferred to give them to the police," Merly said, adding that the climber stumbled upon the box and that some of the sachets containing the precious stones bore the stamp ‘Made in India.’ French authorities are contacting their Indian counterparts to trace the owner or heirs of the jewels. Under French law, the jewelry could be handed over to the mountaineer if these are not identified, Merly said.

Occasionally, one hears of people stumbling upon buried treasure, such as in the text we are studying. It was always my dream as a bottom-trawling fisherman on the East coast of England to come across one of the ships containing gold that was sunk on the treacherous sandbanks. I had researched the Spanish Armada ships that were sunk, the gold bullion ship that went down somewhere along our coast, and the HMS Victory (the one before Nelson’s Flagship) that went down with 100,000 gold Portuguese coins on board somewhere along our coast where I fished. If I had found any of those ships with their treasure, it would be nothing compared to the spiritual

treasure that I have found in Christ. The riches of Christ are of much greater worth than the whole world full of treasure.

In the days when the New Testament was written, there were no banks where a person could keep his treasure safe from the many marauding armies that came through Judea and Samaria. People would hide their valuables in the ground, as it was the safest place to keep them. There were many wars in Palestine, and people would sometimes have to leave their treasure in times of war and hope, that after the fighting ceased, they could come back later to retrieve it. Sometimes, the people were killed, and other times they were deported to distant lands, e.g. such as the Assyrian and Babylonian dispersion, and they could not retrieve their valuables. The man in the parable of the hidden treasure seems to be as a man that was not rich as he was quite excited and full of joy at his find (Matthew 13:44).

The picture is possibly of a laborer brought onto a piece of land to plow for the owner. As he was plowing, the treasure was unearthed. As he looked over the treasure, he realized the value of his find and decided that he would hide it back in the earth again. Ancient rabbinical law stated that if a workman came across treasure in a situation like this, the legal owner would be the one who owned the field. He could have stolen it and sold it off in a neighboring country. The owner of the field would have been none the wiser, but he decided to sell all that he had and, when he had enough money, buy the field from the landowner.

Was the man being unethical by what he did—why or why not? What is the main point of the parable?

There are two interpretations of this parable. First, some would say that Christ is the servant of God that has come to labor in the fields and has found His treasure, the church, and has given up all so that He may buy the field with His own blood to purchase and take the church to Himself. Some Bible scholars have held this view, and that interpretation is a distinct possibility.

However, there is another way that the parable can be interpreted. This is the interpretation I favor with both parables. In the second interpretation, Christ Himself is the treasure. Some people were not looking for Him, but in some way, they stumbled onto the truth about Christ hidden from view in the field of the world. Some see no value at all. All they see is the field, but they do not look below the surface of things to see the treasure that is hidden. Those who see little value view things from the perspective of this world alone. To them the things of God are considered foolish (1 Corinthians 2:14). Others see great value in the things of eternity, and they trade the things of the temporary world that they may hold onto the things of the unseen world. Such was the testimony of the apostle Paul:

What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3:8).

I must make it clear that a relationship with God is not something that can be “bought.” There is no way that we can buy righteousness with our own efforts and resources. I believe that the emphasis in this passage speaks of the value that the man places on this treasure and the decision

that he makes to acquire it at all costs. With this parable, as with all the parables, the details are not to be stressed. We are to take the main point of the story. Everything else is subservient to that one point. What happens when we make a purchase? One thing is exchanged for another. In this case, our broken lives for His eternal life. “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, **buy** and eat! Come, **buy** wine and milk **without money and without cost**” (Isaiah 55:1). When we buy something, we give up some commodity or treasure that we have in order to obtain something that we deem to be of greater value. We are to see the great value in selling all and focusing our souls on the Lord Jesus that we may attain “to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, **in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**” (Colossians 2:2-3). Like the apostle Paul, the Lord would have us release our grip on the things of this world so that we may gain Christ. The man in the parable sold everything that he had so that he might buy the field.

One day, you must leave this world, and if your focus in life is just on the field of this world rather than the treasure hidden, what will your last words be? Voltaire, the famous French Enlightenment philosopher said just before he died, “In the name of God, please let me die in peace.” Consider also the last words of Elizabeth 1, the Queen of England, who said, “All my possessions for a moment of time.” We should live our lives being mindful of the life that is to come. Remember, the life we live on this earth is but a shadow of the real life beyond this plane of existence. God offers us His treasure if we will receive Him, the person of Christ. Along with Him, we get everything. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not **with him** also **freely give us all things**?” (Romans 8:32). Many who stumble upon these words that speak of a Savior will later regret that they did not lay hold of the truth in that verse. This gospel of Christ is hidden in the field of the world, but people plow their fields day after day and do not give a care where they are going when they pass from this world.

This man in the parable went out and released his grip on other things so that he could fully hold on to the treasure. To release our grip on the things of this world, we are to consecrate or sanctify ourselves to the Lord. “**May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through**” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). The English word *consecrate* is translated from the Hebrew word, *male'* (מלא – Strong's 04390) and *yad* (יָד – Strong's 03027). It literally means to have full hands. The thought is to so give ourselves to the God of creation that our hands are empty of other things so that we are full with God. It is possible for us to hold certain things so tightly that we are not able to receive the things that God would give to us. Our hands can be full of all kinds of things. We may think that they are possessions; however, sometimes they possess us! Even man-made religion with a careful system of do's and don'ts can keep a person from laying hold of the truth in Christ. Get rid of anything that would keep you from laying hold of eternal treasure. Open your hands so that He may fill them. Let's now take a look at the second parable.

The Pearl of Great Value

⁴⁵Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it (Matthew 13:45-46).

Why does Jesus choose the analogy of a merchant? What does a merchant do?

Let's think about the ways that people make a living. People trade time and energy to get a wage at the end of the week. Henry Ford, the founder of the Ford Motor Company, did not invent the car; he is famous for inventing the assembly line technique of mass production of the car. When his assembly line stopped, he called an engineer that he knew of to fix it so that production could start up again. The man came, and after ten minutes of tinkering, he fixed the problem and gave Henry Ford the bill for \$10,000. When Ford complained as to why ten minutes work amounted to that high of a bill, the man amended the bill showing ten dollars for tinkering with the generators and \$9,990 for the time it took to learn to know where to tinker.

Some people spend many years learning a skill or trading knowledge for money. This is what a merchant does. He trades knowledge for money. He does not depend on the sweat of his brow or trading time for money to obtain riches. He depends on his knowledge of whatever commodity he is trading, and in this case, it is his knowledge of pearls. A person does not come into the kingdom of God by the sweat of his brow by working hard to earn position or even by one's knowledge of the topic of religion. It is by knowing a person, the person of Christ. It is not *what* you know that justifies you. It is *who* you know: "**by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities**" (Isaiah 53:11).

The Merchant Goes Out Seeking

The merchant, a picture of you and me, goes forth doing four things. First, he seeks, then he finds, then he sells all his stuff and buys what he finds. Everyone's story is unique, but as for my quest for spirituality, I did not stumble upon the truth of God. I was a seeker. There was a time in my life when God put such a desire in me to find answers to the many questions I had about life. Some of these questions arose in me after a near-death experience and a number of fishing incidents where, but for the grace of God, I could have easily lost my life. I travelled across thirty different countries on a search for truth. I studied Buddhism, Hinduism, and philosophy, and I finally heard the message of the Gospel. When I found the pearl of great price, I responded immediately. There is a ring of truth to the Gospel when one hears of the grace and mercy of God as it is in Christ Jesus.

If you are a seeker, I would suggest that you look hard at the pearl and explore the truths of what God has done for you. The man seeking for pearls is a picture of a man who doesn't stumble upon the truth; he is actively engaged in thinking through his seeking. Some people do not want to think. It is hard to think. It takes time and focus while one explores diligently. The enemy of our souls (Satan) will keep us busy with all kinds of trivial and unimportant things in an attempt to distract and to keep us asleep to the things of God. Nothing should be as important to you as seeking to find the pearl of great value (Jesus).

A merchant whose focus in life was pearls would travel to wherever he might find pearls. He would be travelling along the coastline, asking pearl divers and fishermen, "Do you have any pearls?" This was the object of his life. His life had purpose and a goal. This merchant had to find pearls. The energy of his life was poured into it.

I think there is a danger in our society of being consumed with the pursuit of pleasure. Our culture is saturated with it. Historians tell us that a pursuit of pleasure was one of the characteristics of ancient Rome that preceded the fall of the Roman Empire. Today, we need to consider that we are headed in a similar direction. Our society and our western culture places a high priority on entertainment and gives a place of honor to our entertainers, which is above the honor we give to any other group. Think about the number of different awards ceremonies that are totally devoted to the entertainment industry. We cannot seem to get enough!

I do not think that it is wrong to enjoy entertainment, and in fact, God can use art to speak to us about eternal things. However, we do need to be keenly aware of the effect that the media has to sedate our senses. I want to live my life wide-awake! Today, it is so easy to be lulled to sleep as we are fed a world of fantasy. I long to see a revival among people today, especially among the young people.

¹⁰Glory in His holy name; Let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad. ¹¹Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually (1 Chronicles 16:10-11).

This man had taken time and thought in order to develop the skill of recognizing a good pearl when he found one. The things of God do not come to those that are half-hearted but to those who pursue after and seek the Lord. What does that mean? What you seek is what you give your attention. We seek God in thought, in prayer, in turning our hearts toward Him, submitting our will to Him, and giving attention to His Word. Again, it all comes down to the question, what do you value?

We seek after that which we deem to be precious. Each person has his or her own idea of that which represents value. That is why Jesus says, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21). When the merchant found the pearl, his search was completed. When someone finds Christ, he finds His kingdom. He finds it all. This search is universal. All people have the same needs and long for the same things. The pearls (plural) that the merchant sought probably symbolize this search. He certainly expected to buy a good many of them.

The Merchant Finds a Pearl of Great Worth

While the man is searching, he comes across one huge pearl that is worth infinitely more than all the pearls he had ever bought before. The merchant was amazed at his find! He could scarcely believe his good fortune, for this remarkable pearl was unlike anything else he had seen. Its beauty was captivating. It is a truth that when one is diligent to seek after good things, God will meet him on the way. When we are on that road, we will meet the Lord upon that road. Put yourself “in the way” and seek after Him with all your heart. All that is lovely and of a pure character is found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We do not know the value of the pearl of great price, but the merchant knew this to be the greatest deal of a lifetime, and he knew it would cost him greatly for this pearl. He sat down and thought through what he would have to give up. He would have no capital left to carry on buying pearls. That in itself would change a good many things about his life. While I was on a long search through many countries looking for rest within my soul, I came across the pearl of great

price, and I gave myself completely to Him. Consequently, I found a wonderful inner rest to my soul that I knew was real. This changed my life. When a man finds all for which his soul has been longing, there are inner changes that take place. He finds that the things of his old life do not hold clout any more. There was an inner joy that flooded my soul after years of searching for the truth about the world, my identity, and my purpose in life.

When the man found this pearl of great price, he resolved within his heart that he would have it. There would be nothing that would keep him from it. This is the heart of a man that pleases God, one with an inner resolve that nothing should keep him from having relationship with Christ. The divine transaction is to give your sins to Him, and He will clothe you with His righteousness. **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).**

The Merchant Sold All That He Had

When the merchant saw the value of what lay before him, he decided that the only way that he could acquire the pearl was to sell all that he had. Let’s think of what this process was like for the merchant. No doubt, he went home and had a garage sale—everything must go! His car, his boat, and his house. Nothing shall keep him from that pearl of great price. If that is the cost, then he will gladly pay it! Out the door went the satellite television, the Xbox, his smart phone. He cashed in all the stocks that he had, pension plan, everything! Then, he went and put up signs in the neighborhood to sell the house for a quick sale. Why a quick sale? Because he was afraid that someone else would offer a better deal to the pearl salesman.

²⁵Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. ²⁷And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’ ³¹“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³²If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³In the same way, **those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples** (Luke 14:25-33).

Is Jesus saying that we should all sell our stuff? What does He mean by giving up everything?

When we enter into covenant relationship with the God of the Universe, we disown ourselves from everything we have. **“You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price”** (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). We are no longer owners but stewards of what God possesses. From the point of giving our lives to Christ, we are managers of those things that we previously owned. For some, like the rich young ruler in Matthew’s Gospel that wanted to know what he still lacked, Jesus replied to him, saying,

“If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” ²²But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (Matthew 19:21-22).

The Lord does not require this of all people, but in this man’s case, his trust was in his possessions, and as we said earlier, to be consecrated or fully His, we must empty our hands of other things that we might fill our hands with Christ.

What are the pleasures that you know to be sinful and stand in the way of your relationship with God? They are not worth it. All must go! There are old habits that need to be given notice! Habits of the tongue can require time to overcome and bring to the cross. I know that this was certainly the case with me as you can imagine. Fishermen are known for their colorful language, and mine was no exception. Have you been trusting in your own righteousness and good works? That needs to be sold cheaply. The Bible says that it is filthy rags anyway (Isaiah 64:6). Bring your reputation, too, for Jesus sacrificed His reputation when He made His way to the cross.

But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:7 King James Version).

It is at this point that many people hesitate. They want to guard their reputation. Some worry about what others will think, what people at work will say about them, or how it may change their family relationships. Jesus said, "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37).

The Merchant Buys the Pearl of Great Price

We come to the fourth thing the merchant does. He takes the money he made selling his possessions, and he buys the pearl. He has great joy in doing so! He is not thinking about all that it has cost him. He is consumed with the joy of acquiring that pearl.

In 1976, I made a unique purchase. It was the year before I became a Christian. I was in Delhi, India, and I bought a souvenir. I wanted a memento from my trip to Asia. It was a silver elephant embedded with semi precious stones, and was about 10 inches high, with a rider perched on top. That elephant travelled to America with me the following year. It would have been easier to take travelers checks, but my thinking was that, if I came across any difficulty, I could sell the elephant to get money in dollars or whatever currency I needed.

Shortly after I became a Christian, I was in a church meeting in Virginia. After the meeting, I overheard a young woman mention how she had just received her first dollar toward her ticket to Israel! She was overjoyed. My heart was touched, and I felt that I needed to give her that elephant toward the price of her ticket. The woman was able to sell the elephant for the money that she needed for her ticket. She was so thankful that she invited me to come and visit Israel and stay with the believers there. I did not realize how this was to change my life. There have been many blessings in my life that have come to me because of the buying and giving of that

elephant. God used it to bring me to Israel where I met so many wonderful people and learned valuable lessons. Through friends that I met while there, I also met my wife, Sandy.

In the matter of the elephant, I guess you could say I stumbled upon a treasure. I had no idea where that purchase would eventually take me.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this study, there are two ways of looking at this parable. I quote from writer and Bible teacher, R.T. Kendall. “One is to see that it is about us seeking God. The other is to see that it is about God seeking us. Guess what is true with the one who finds that pearl? You find out that God was behind your seeking all along, and you thank Him that He stayed with you, got your attention and caused you to want it above all else. So it was God seeking us after all.”¹

Prayer: Father, thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ and His accomplished work on the cross, dying in my place to pay the price of the debt of my sin. Let not the things of this world hide the treasure from me any longer. Open my eyes to see the value of a relationship with Christ. Help me to empty my hands of things to which I am clinging that I may be filled with Christ. Amen!

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¹ R.T. Kendall, The Parables of Jesus, Published by Chosen Books, Page 76.