

## Mysteries of the Kingdom - Matthew 13:44-46 The Kingdom's Outcome - The Treasure and Pearl

I have a good friend who is a twin. I remember the first time I met her sister. She introduced me and, not realizing she was a twin, I remember saying, "well you can sure tell you both are sisters." My friend replied, "that's because we're twins." Yet it was also clear that, although they were so very similar, they were also very distinct. That is how it is with these two parables; like with the Mustard Seed and Leaven parables, they belong together. As one commentator says, these parables "are twin parables with likenesses so evident that they cannot deny the blood bond. Yet, as with twin children, each is markedly individual. The resemblances and the differences can be best shown as they are considered in company."

Let's consider first these **perplexing parables** by starting with an observation. As with the mustard seed and leaven parables, these may seem to say one thing, but upon deeper study, we realize they speak of something far different. The general interpretation we have always heard may not necessarily be the correct one. What is that general interpretation? It is that the sinner finds Christ and gives up everything to gain Him and be saved. Many gospel songs have been written picturing Jesus as the pearl of great price. One song says, "I've found the Pearl of greatest price, My heart doth sing for joy; And sing I must, for Christ I have, Oh, what a Christ have I."

But there are several problems with this interpretation. Many commentators clarify that these parables are not a picture of a sinner seeking Christ but of Christ seeking His own. Here are the problems with the standard interpretation. First of all, Jesus Christ is NOT a hidden treasure! He is perhaps the best known person of history. Furthermore, a sinner cannot "find" Christ. Romans 3:10-18 is clear that there is none who seeks after God. A lost sinner has no desire to go out and find Christ! Instead, it is Christ who seeks sinners. Jesus said, "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). But perhaps the strongest argument against the standard interpretation is that nobody could ever PURCHASE salvation! Notice that man did not purchase the treasure - he purchased the field! Matthew 13:38 tells us that "the field is the world." Must then a person purchase the world to be saved? And then would that person hide Christ after purchasing Him?

Hopefully, it is clear then that these parables do not present a picture of a person seeking Christ! It is instructive to note that Jesus is not speaking to the crowds, only to His disciples - vv. 36ff. Realizing that he spoke mustard seed and leaven parables to the crowds gives meaning to their interpretation. In the same way, realizing He speaks these parables to His own should aid in understanding them. What then is the meaning of these?

Notice that the first parable, the hidden treasure, teaches us about a **precious people**. The parable says the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. We have already noted that the scripture says the field is the world. What does the scripture say about treasure? Ex. 19:5, Deut. 7:6, Deut. 14:2, and Ps. 135:4 are just a few of the verses that describe Israel as God's "special treasure." That being the case, then, the man would be the Lord seeking His chosen people!

What then of this treasure being in a field (the world) and being hidden? Well, obviously the Jewish nation is in the world! So to say the treasure was in a field (the Jewish

nation was in the world) makes sense. But what of the hidden aspect? What was the purpose of the Jewish nation? Why did God choose them? Isaiah tells us, “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations” (Is. 42:1). Israel failed in this mission. Instead of sharing the light they hoarded it. As a result, the words spoken by Paul and Barnabas at Antioch on the first missionary journey became true: “. . . it was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you (the Jews) first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold e are turning to the Gentiles. For thus the Lord has commanded u, ‘I have placed you as a light for the Gentiles, that you should bring salvation to the end of the earth.’” (Acts 13:46-47).

The Jews failure to share the light of God’s truth resulted in their being hidden. They became a treasure not being invested to produce dividends for God. Yet they still belonged to God, and as such He intended to purchase them. Listen closely to what is recorded in John 11:49-52: “But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‘you know nothing at all, nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish.’ Now this he did not say on his own initiative; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die **for the nation, and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.**” Some people believe in a limited atonement, i.e., that Christ only died for those who would be saved. I believe that Scripture teaches clearly that Jesus’ death was SUFFICIENT for all, but only EFFICIENT for those who would believe. Who did Jesus die for? 1 John 2:2 says clearly, “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, **but for those of the whole world.**” Jesus died to purchase the world. That does not mean He died in vain since some are lost. In Romans 1, Paul talks about being “without excuse.” For those who do not believe the death of Christ was not in vain – rather it is the means of condemnation.

Jesus died for all people, but in a special way He died for His precious people - the Jews. He came to purchase them with His blood and in purchasing the field (i.e. dying for the world) in general He also purchased the treasure hidden in that field (i.e. His people, Israel). There IS a future for the Jewish nation. On May 14, 1948, the world witnessed the re-birth of the Jewish nation. Politically, they now have a future. Yet, currently, they are far from what they ought to be spiritually. But the Word of God tells us that during the Tribulation the Jewish nation will again be used by God as His instrument of salvation - many Jews will turn to Christ. The treasure will not only be revealed but also used in service of the owner.

So, in the parable of the treasure, we see a picture of Christ purchasing the Jewish nation. They are His treasured people - a precious people. Just because we live in the church age does not mean God is finished with Israel. Remember Jesus is speaking ONLY to His disciples - men of faith and insight. Also Jewish men who here gain assurance that their nation DOES have a prominent role to play in the Kingdom of God!

Jesus then proceeds to tell another parable about a Pearl. This tells us about a **purchased people**. If the treasure represents the Jews then the Pearl represents the Church. Jesus used an interesting word for merchant man. It is the Greek word anthropo emporo. It has the primary meaning of one who goes on a ship as a passenger. Certainly Jesus, who the merchant man pictures, was simply a passenger. Heaven was His eternal abode, yet He stepped into time as a man. He became a passenger on this earth so we could become a resident of Heaven. Later on, the word came to signify a wholesale dealer. In this sense it pictures a man

who knows all about pearls. He could discern their real worth and would not be deceived by any sham. It is a wonderful picture of the worth of each of us. We are created in God's image, worth the death of God's only Son. Perhaps you have seen the quip "I'm special cause God don't make no junk!" We look at others and tend to develop a worthiness hierarchy. But God looks at all people and sees them as pearls - worth the death of His Son!

This picture of Jesus looking for the pearl is further strengthened by use of the word seeking. The Greek implies leaving one place to go to another. Is that not what our Lord did for us? The scripture declares, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men, And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:5-8). Jesus left the glories of heaven to come to this earth to redeem His own.

We have already seen how the parable of the treasure shows this for the Jews. How then does this parable show this for the church? Consider what is true about a pearl. First, it is a product of a living organism. That is not true of any other gem, but it is true of a pearl. It is produced as the result of an injury suffered by a living organism (usually, an oyster). Some extraneous substance like sand or some parasitic intruder gets inside the oyster, and out of much suffering, an object of beauty is produced. Is this not also true of the church? The church exists because something alive (the Lord Jesus) suffered injury (crucifixion). As Herbert Lockyer says, "greater than the mystery and wonder of the creation of a pearl in an oyster shell, is the marvel of Him who, through the travail and pain our sin caused Him, covered us over and transformed the thing of injury to the desired thing. As the little grain of sand is ultimately clothed with a beauty not its own, so we are covered with a comeliness of Him who suffered on our behalf."

But consider also a pearl's course of existence. It is at first embedded in a mass of living but corruptible flesh, then it is separated and cleansed from its surroundings to appear in purity and beauty. Again, is this not true also of the Church? At present we exist among living and corruptible flesh. But the day will come when this corruptible puts on incorruptible Paul said in 1 Cor. 15. The day will come when what Paul described is true: "that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:27).

Think also about a pearl's origin and destination. Originally a pearl's home is in the depths of the sea, among the filth and mire. In the same way apart from Christ we find ourselves at home in the depths of sin. Yet as the diver descends into the depths to extricate the pearl and bring it up to the light, Jesus went down at the sacrifice of His life to bring us up from sin to the light of His love!

Finally, consider the course of a pearl's development. Who sees the development of the pearl? None but God! It is done in secret and revealed at a later time. Who sees the development of the Church? We see the wood, the stone, the mortar, the cement. We see the development and growth of the visible, organized church. But nobody sees the true Church and the growth God is bringing there! Paul says our life is "hidden with God in Christ" (Col. 3:3). In a very real way, God is forming us and shaping us in this life. Often that is through trials and those trials are unknown by anybody, just as the pearl develops secretly. But the day comes when the pearl is fully developed and revealed to the world. In the same way, as Paul said, "for I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with

the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:18-19).

And notice finally here that Jesus says the merchant man sold all he had to buy this pearl. Friends, let me tell you that it took all God had to purchase you. It took the death of His dear, precious Son. But because of that death, we who were separated from God can now become part of His kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man. The pearl is still being formed for the church is yet unfinished. Is He seeking you today?

A little girl was taking an evening walk with her father one night. Wonderingly, she looked up at the stars and exclaimed; ‘Oh, Daddy, if the wrong side of heaven is so beautiful, what must the right side be!’ Each fall, the changing of the leaves makes me realize the truth of the Psalmist, “The heavens declare the glory of God . . .” (Ps. 19:1). Such is truly unbelievable, yet it is nothing compared to the beauty of God’s Kingdom. But the glory of that kingdom is only for those who belong to it. Jesus said His chosen nation was a treasure - so much so that He purchased the world to save them. And He said His church was a pearl of great price - worth His very life to be purchased. Has He purchased you?