

THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Matthew 13:45, 46

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Where is God working in this world? How is He carrying out His plans and purposes in this present age? What is the Christian's relationship to God's sovereign will in the period between the first and second advents of Christ? The answers to these questions are hinted at in the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price. NOTE: Again I confess to you that my particular interpretation of this parable may be open to debate because our Lord gives no divine interpretation to the parable. There will naturally have to be some subjectivity in my interpretation of this parable, but the theology in it is based on essentially right doctrine.

B. This parable is important because it adds another link to the mysteries of the kingdom in this present age while Jesus Christ, the King and His earthly kingdom is absent from the world. NOTE: It should be noted that this parable was given to the disciples only and so it is truth that concerns true believers and must be grasped by faith. The unsaved world does not understand these truths.

II. THE PARABLE 13:45, 46

III. THE INTERPRETATION

A. If we are going to follow the basic pattern in most of the parables in Matthew 13, then it is proper to see the merchantman symbolizing Christ Himself. In other parables, Christ was the Sower, the planter of the wheat and the planter of the mustard seed. The Parable of the Hid Treasure is very much like this parable and there again the man was Christ. Throughout these parables, it is Christ who is active throughout this age. It is logical, therefore, to conclude that it is Christ who comes as a merchant seeking fine pearls.

B. What then do the pearls and the pearl of great price symbolize? Admittedly, this is not an easy symbol to define. This certainly seems to be a natural oriental picture. The Hebrew people did not value pearls. In the Old Testament much is said about diamonds, rubies, sapphires, agates and other valuable stones but nothing about pearls. However, the Lord assumes that this illustration would be familiar to the disciples. All of the disciples were Galileans and Galilee was a region to which many Gentiles came. The disciples would be familiar with Gentile traders who came looking for valuable pearls and who would pay fabulous prices for them. NOTE: Last week we saw how the Parable of the Hid Treasure symbolizes Israel and how God still has plans and purposes for national Israel in this present age but this will not come about until just before or at the second advent of Christ. The long awaited Messiah came to Israel and the nation as a whole rejected Him. Our Lord, knowing long before of Israel's rejection, still went to the Cross to make provision for the Jews in the New Covenant when they do turn to the Messiah. The long awaited Messiah came and offered His kingdom but Israel rejected. Then Christ announced that the kingdom was being taken away from Israel and given to another nation (Matthew 21:43). That new nation is the church (I Peter 2:9). NOTE: Last week we saw how Christ sold all to purchase Israel, His treasure. But what other treasure does God value in this world? What other entity has Christ given up everything

to purchase it? The obvious answer is the church (Eph. 5:25b). NOTE: The church is the major part of God's kingdom program in this present age. While the King and His kingdom is absent, God is calling out a people for Himself, who are spiritual children of Christ's kingdom (Acts 15:14; 1 Peter 2:9, 10).

Matthew 21:43: Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

1 Peter 2:9: But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Ephesians 5:25b: Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it.

Acts 15:14: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

1 Peter 2:9, 10: But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

C. Why did our Lord use the symbol of the pearl to describe the church? Of all the jewels of the world, only the pearl is a product of living matter. A pearl is the response of an oyster to something which causes it injury. A pearl grows out of hurt. Perhaps we should familiarize ourselves with the way a pearl is formed. A little particle of sand gets inside the shell of the oyster and it irritates the lining of the oyster. The oyster has no way of removing the sand so its only defense is to transform the thing that is injuring it. The response of the oyster to that which is irritating it is to transmute and transform it into something that is no longer a source of irritation. The oyster keeps on covering the sand with a soft delicate nacre which is built up layer by layer until it forms a lustrous, shining and beautiful jewel. NOTE: What a beautiful picture of the church. The church is made up of sinners saved by God's grace. Before conversion to Christ, we were rough, crude sand in rebellion to the sovereign King, Jesus Christ. Just as the sand is an alien and foreign object to the oyster, so in our unsaved states we were aliens and foreigners to Christ and His purposes (Ephesians 2:11-13). Yes, we were aliens, but God in grace sought to change our position before Him. Christ, who is the merchantman, began to seek precious pearls for Himself. Christ took the initiative in grace to save us (Luke 19:10). And all that we have as members of the universal church is by the grace of God (Ephesians 2:1-5). NOTE: Christ in love sought us when we were unlovely. Christ in grace sought us when we were ungracious and Christ in mercy sought us when we were unmerciful! NOTE: Who then are the pearls and the pearl of great price? The pearls are individual Christians who Christ is seeking and the pearl of great price is the church collectively.

Ephesians 2:11-13: Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Luke 19:10: For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Ephesians 2:1-5: And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversion (manner of life) in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).

D. This parable tells us that when the merchantman found the pearl of great price he “went and sold all he had, and bought it.” This is an amazing thought that boggles the human mind: Christ purchased the church before the church ever existed. At His death at Calvary, He bought the church. He redeemed the church (Ephesians 1:7). NOTE: Do we really understand what Christ did at the cross? Perhaps our understanding of redemption is too secular. Some may think of “redemption” in a commercial sense such as redemption centers where you get gifts with stamps which were given you when you purchased something in a store. Maybe we think of redemption as nothing more than making a purchase of something in a marketplace. Perhaps we think of Christ’s death too much in physical terms such as the agony of the cross, the physical hurt, the anguish, the injury, the pain, the thirst, the tears, the darkness, the death – all these we can understand. But what does it mean when it says that Christ redeemed us? It means that Christ was spiritually made sin for us (II Cor. 5:21). He substituted for our sin in a spiritual way that we can never understand. He felt our hurt because of sin. He knew our aching loneliness, our heartache, our misery, our rejection, our sense of despair, our worthlessness, our meaninglessness and our awful hostility that results from sin. Christ knew all about these before we ever existed and He died for us as a sinner’s substitute, knowing full well what our hatred and enmity towards God really was. He loved us before we ever loved Him (I John 4:9, 10). Christ died to take our hurt so he could heal us and minister to us. He gave His life for His precious pearl that we might have life (II Cor. 8:9). ILLUSTRATION: Hymn

Ephesians 1:7: In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.

II Cor. 5:21: For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

I John 4:9, 10: In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

II Cor. 8:9: For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

ILLUSTRATION: We sing this hymn often but do we understand what it means?

Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

E. The analogies between a pearl and the church are many but one that stands out is that it takes time for the oyster to transform the sand into a pearl. The pearl begins to be formed when the first layer of nacre is put over the sand but it takes years to get the finished product. Christ died for the church and He will one day present the church to the Father a glorious church but it takes time to get the finished product. NOTE: We wonder why we must go through trials and difficulties, but it is not hard to understand from a divine viewpoint. Through the sanctification process the Lord is taking all the defects out of us, healing our hurt and sorrow, and bringing about a glorious church, a church without spot or blemish. NOTE: God is working out His purpose in the church through you. Through your sufferings as a Christian, God is transforming you into a pearl He wants you to be – a glowing, translucent, beautiful pearl.

F. The ultimate goal of our salvation is that God is working all things now so as to make us trophies of His grace in the future (Ephesians 2:4-7). In the ages to come, the church will be a total manifestation of God's grace. We shall share in Christ's kingdom in time and in eternity. NOTE: However, until those ages come, the church and each individual who makes up the church is a pearl under construction. God is not through with us yet. He is working out His purposes through the daily grind of life with all its pressures, turmoil and perplexities. These things are God's instruments to make you a beautiful pearl. Don't resist these trials. Don't push them out of your life. Welcome them and learn to glory in them (Phil. 4:4; I Thess. 5:18; cf. II Cor. 12:8-10). NOTE: In and through all eternity, each Christian individually and the church collectively will be a demonstration of God's infinite grace. It is only as we understand God's purposes will we really be able to cope with the pressures and uncertainties of life now (II Cor. 4:17). ILLUSTRATION: Be Patient.

Ephesians 2:4-7: But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead by sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

Phil. 4:4: Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.

I Thess. 5:18: In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

II Cor. 12:8-10: For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Acts 14:22: That we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

Ii Cor. 4:17: For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

ILLUSTRATION: Several weeks ago I received a cardboard plaque from Linda Hess in the mail. She bought this with herself in mind but when I received it I thought it was meant for me. The

plaque says “Please be patient. God isn’t finished with me yet.” That’s it, we are all unfinished products; we are all under construction; we are all being made into beautiful pearls.

IV. CONCLUSION

A. You here this morning without Christ as your personal Savior! How have you viewed history? Do you see history as a record of civilizations, kingdoms, battles, explorations and discoveries? Have you ever thought that history has a beginning and ending and that the Bible says it will end at the second advent of Christ. Christ is coming again to end this present age.

B. However, God’s purposes are being carried out in this present age through the church. He is calling out a people for His name. He is calling men from every nation, race and background to Christ. Christ died for the church and is getting the church ready for His kingdom.

C. Did Christ die for you? Is God calling you? You will never know until you receive Jesus Christ as your King, Lord and Savior. The moment you receive Christ, you will have your sins forgiven and be granted eternal life. The moment you believe in Christ, you will be guaranteed a place in Christ’s kingdom.

D. This present age may well be coming to a close and Christ’s return may not be too far distant. If you are without Christ, I warn you that you shall face judgment (II Thess. 1:7b-9)!

II Thess. 1:7b-9: When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power!