

The Pearl of Great Price

by Albert N. Martin

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Now we turn again this morning to the Gospel of Matthew and chapter 13. And as I did two Lord's Days ago, I shall read selected portions from the 13th chapter of Matthew.

Verse 1-3: "On that day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And there were gathered unto Him great multitudes, so that He entered into a boat, and sat; and all the multitude stood on the beach. And He spoke to them many things in parables...[and then there follows the parable of the soils and the sower]."

Verses 10-13: "And the disciples came, and said unto Him, Why do You speak unto them in parables? And He answered and said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but whosoever has not, from him shall be taken away even that which he has. Therefore speak I to them in parables; because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand."

Verse 34-36a: "All these things spoke Jesus in parables unto the multitudes; and without a parable spoke He nothing unto them: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world. Then he left the multitudes, and went into the house...."

Verses 44-46: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in the field; which a man found, and hid; and in his joy he goes and sells all that he hath, and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls: and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

Well, having been reminded from this very portion that if we are to understand the things of God, it must be given to us, let us come to the God who says ask and it shall be given unto you. Let us together ask.

Our Father, we would come acknowledging that apart from the present activity of the Holy Spirit illuminating our minds, we shall understand nothing aright from Your Word; we shall understand nothing in a way that profits our souls. We think of these multitudes who heard the very words of Truth incarnate, the One who said, "I speak not My own words, but I speak the words that My Father gives Me. The words that I speak are spirit and they are life." None ever spoke as that man spoke, and yet, our Father, we read that eyes were blind and ears were deaf. O God, have mercy upon us. Open our eyes that we may see wondrous things out of Your Word. Unstop our ears we pray, and come to preacher and people alike with illuminating life-giving, life-

transforming grace and power in and through the preaching of Your Word. Hear us for Jesus' sake we plead. Amen.

Two Lord's Days ago we considered together the parable of the hidden treasure, the first of these twin parables found in Matthew 13:44-46. And these two parables are found in the midst of seven parables recorded here in Matthew 13. And they are often identified or described as the kingdom parables because the kingdom of God is the central theme of each of those parables, that kingdom which has come in the person and in the work and grace and power of the King Himself, even our Lord Jesus Christ. The passage read in your hearing, Matthew 13 and following, clearly teaches us that the parables were spoken by our Lord both to reveal in grace to some, but to conceal in judgment to others. They are both a revealing and a concealing tool of instruction in the hands of our blessed Lord. And while the other parables in this chapter convey some very vital lessons on such themes as how the message of the kingdom is received (the parable of the sower and the soil), the fact of the mixed character and the future perfecting of the kingdom (the growth and development of the kingdom is like leaven--it is like a mustard seed), it is in these two parables, the parable of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great worth, that we are taught something of the preciousness of the kingdom.

When the kingdom of grace draws near in the King of grace, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in a field and like unto a man seeking good or excellent pearls. Now because both parables teach essentially the same thing, some commentators and some preachers have expounded them in tandem. They did this because they felt it was either unnecessary or would be tedious to treat them separately as I am doing. Well, to those who have thought that way and think that way and act that way, I can do no better than read the words of a Scottish preacher and writer from the 19th century by the name of William Arnot. And he writes in his introduction to his separate treatment of "The Pearl of Great Price",

"So closely allied are these two parables that if we regard as repetition as a formidable blemish in our teaching, we would have not have proposed to expound them separately and successively. We would have at least put some time in between them lest people think we are guilty of absent-minded repetition. The two lines are coincidence or parallel throughout their whole link except at one point. But there the diversity is broadly marked amounting in one aspect to a specific contrast. In view of this difference on the one hand and the example of the Lord on the other, I think it right to open and apply the parable of the pearl as fully as if the parable of the hidden treasure had not gone before it.

"We need and get not only different pictures of the same objects, but also the same pictures repeated in different colors and on different grounds. One eye may be more touched and taken by this color and another by that, although the outline of the objects be in both cases essentially the same. Your eye may be attracted to red, and so the bird is outlined in red. And your eye turns to the red bird. Someone else is more natively and naturally attracted to yellow. And the same kind of bird and shape is depicted, but it's yellow. Your eye instinctively turns to the yellow. Here is a wise teacher recognizing that this is a fact of natural revelation. And in conveying the stuff of special revelation, God does not ignore what He has woven in the fabric of natural revelation. Thus the conception of a treasure found may convey the meaning of a more impressively to one mind. And the conception of a pearl purchased may convey it more impressively to another. And so, although the lesson of the second parable

had been more nearly identical with that of the first than it is, it would not have been expedient to dismiss it with just a passing notice.

"By a full examination of the principle under the picture of a precious pearl, we shall obtain the advantage which in moral questions as in material operations is often unspeakably great, namely, that of a second blow upon the same spot. You're hammering on the rock at the same spot, and after the second or third blow, it begins to have a crack, and it's on its way to being broken. The usefulness and even the necessity of this method is acknowledged by all teachers in whatever department they may be called to exercise their office. "The same reasons, moreover, which induced the Master to reduplicate His lesson, demands that we should also reduplicate ours. It is our part, both in the matter and in the method, to follow the steps of our Lord. He thought it good and necessary and wise to give us these twin parables, which in their essential lesson are identical. In one prominent difference, there is a very helpful lesson to be learned. But if the Lord Jesus did not scruple to say to His own disciples back to back the kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure; the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant seeking goodly pearls, we should submit to the wisdom and pattern and practice of our Lord."

Therefore, we take up the twin parable this morning, that older brother or sister of the parable of the treasure hid in the field. And we begin as we did with the previous parable with an explanation of the basic elements of the parable.

First of all, note the identity of the man. And when one reads the parables together, one is struck with a different focus right at the outset. Verse 44: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden...." The focus is immediately of a treasure hidden somewhere. This parable begins with the words "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant...." Like unto a treasure, an inanimate object; like unto a man that is a merchant. It is like unto a merchant, and this merchant is one who traffics in pearls. And the word used for merchant could be rendered "a wholesale dealer." It's the Greek word from which we get our English word "an emporium," the opposite of the emporium was a cupolas. He would be your common street vendor. He would be the retailer whose dickering in the bizarre or in the marketplace with pearls of various worth. But this man is a sure enough expert in pearls. He is a real gemologist who traffics not in cheap stuff, but he's a wholesaler who traffics in first-grade pearls. He is described as a merchant man seeking goodly pearls. That is, he's engaged in seeking to lay hold of pearls that are of unusually high quality.

This word for pearl or the word "pearl," used several times in the New Testament enables us to recognize that when our Lord spoke these words, the pearl was a gem of unusual worth. Because they did not yet know how to have cultured pearls (and there were all kinds of romantic and superstitious notions of how the pearl was formed in the oyster shell), the pearl is put right up there with gold and silver and precious stones. Two times in the book of Revelation, pearls are mentioned with gold and precious stones, one time included in the list of gold and silver and precious stones. When Jesus said, "Cast not your pearls before swine," He understood and knew that the average listener there on the hillside, when He spoke the Sermon on the Mount, would understand it to mean, do not cast that which is of extreme worth and precious (intrinsically worth much) before swine. So that's who the man in the parable is. He's a wholesale merchant who deals in first-class, first-rate precious pearls.

Now note the activity of the man. We're told three things about his activity. First of all, we are told that he was continually seeking these fine pearls. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant [and there you have a present participle: continually in search of goodly pearls]." He didn't read one day in *The Wall Street Journal* that pearls were going to be the next hot ticket and say, "Well, I'll dabble awhile in being a pearl merchant and read a few books or go to a weekend seminar on how to distinguish pearls." No, this man had taken up pearls for his life. Here is a wholesale merchant that is constantly in a search for the highest grade pearls that are out there on the market. That's what our Lord says about his activity--continually seeking fine pearls, like a good diamond merchant who knows that there are diamonds and there are diamonds. Most of us with our untrained eye, we couldn't tell the difference. If it glistens and sparkles and looks nice, we would say that looks like a lovely diamond. But it takes a gemologist to take his eyepiece and look into that diamond and hold it in different lights. And he can grade it as to this, that, and the other. That's what this man was continually doing. Pearls were his business life. That's the first thing about his activity, continually seeking fine pearls.

The second thing is that in that activity, he comes upon one pearl of exceeding great value. Our text says, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant [continually] seeking goodly pearls [excellent pearls]: and having found one pearl of great price [of exceeding great worth]...." The only other use of this word in the New Testament is John 12:3 where it speaks of the ointment with which Mary anointed Jesus. And most of the translations describe it as ointment that is very precious. Now try to live out the seen. Your life is pearls, and you've become an expert in pearls of great worth. You're not dabbling in the stuff that is market ware junk. You're dealing with high class stuff, so your eye is trained to look at those characteristics. The moment you come up to a man's shelf where he has his pearls laid out, your eye can immediately distinguish those that are a cut above the others. And you discount the others and set your eye upon the excellent pearls. And one day in the course of doing that, someone with whom you are doing business spreads out his pearls, and before you is something that takes your breath away. And when the man's eye lights upon this, it's as though he's never seen another pearl. Its size, its shape, its luster--he comes close to it; he examines it and does everything with it that a pearl merchant who's an expert would do with his pearls. And he is so taken up with the exceeding great worth of this pearl that he strikes a deal with the merchant on the spot. And he says, "All that I possess for this pearl." And this merchant happens to know that back home this guy's got a 10-room house. He knows that he's got a vintage Corvette sitting out in his garage. He knows that in the display case in his family room (he was, when he was younger, a baseball nut), he's got one of the baseballs that Roger Maris hit out in Yankee stadium in the year when he had the record until Mark McGwire came along. And in there, he's got an original glove from Stan Musial. He's got all kinds of baseball memorabilia of tremendous worth. And this guy's been to his home, and he knows all that he's got. And he says, "Look, George, everything I have for this pearl." And George says, "Man, I know something of what he's got--that vintage Corvette, his 10-room house. It's a good deal for me." And this man who has found this pearl of exceeding great price is persuaded he's getting a bargain. So what does he do?

The next activity is described as selling all he possess and acquiring the pearl. Again, look at the text: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking [excellent] pearls: and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it." You see the verbs? He went, he sold, he bought.

Here's a man who is a pearl merchant in first-grade, high-class pearls. Perhaps he had a safe deposit box in his local bank with the best of his good pearls. And people know at the bank when he comes in and asks for the safe deposit box, he's depositing one of those excellent pearls. His reputation is known throughout the community. And low and behold, he comes in on that Monday morning and says, "I want my safe deposit box. I'm closing up business with the bank. I'm going to put them all on auction this week." And they look at him and say, "What in the world has gotten a hold of you? Why, what's in that box is known by all in the community. Those are the best of the best pearls." He says, "Ah ha, no more. If you had seen what I've seen, what I'm determined to have, you'd know these high-class pearls are now second-rate pearls. I've found one pearl that's worth everything." And a notice goes up in his yard: "House sale next Saturday. All the contents must go." One day auction--everything liquidated. Look at the text, folks, "sold all that he had." Use your imagination. What would it mean to sell all that he had? He empties out his safe deposit box, sells his house, auctions off his vintage Corvette, and auctions off his baseball memorabilia. And he takes all the proceeds now converted into cash, and he goes to George the merchant and says, "Take my stuff, but give me the pearl." And maybe they write out a deed validating it was done. I don't know what the customs were. But the Scripture says, "Who having found it, he went, he sold, and he bought it."

Now these are the basic elements of the parable. The man is identified as a wholesale pearl merchant who was in the business of seeking only good, high-class, first-grade pearls finds this exceedingly rare and precious gem, and he goes, sells all that he has and buys it. Now that's an explanation of the basic facts of the parable.

Secondly, an identification of the central lesson of the parable. What is the central lesson? Well, here I have to do as I did with the other parable and state what it is not. Pastor Lamar has mentioned this on more than one occasion, and so have I. Reading commentaries is not only at times tremendously edifying and a humbling thing. At times it's a humorous thing. And you have to laugh at what sincere men think God put in His Word. And when we think of this parable; what is its central lesson, let me state very simply and briefly what it is not. This parable is not intended to teach the kind of truth found in a passage such as Ephesians 5:25 and following: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself up for it." There are some who say that in this parable, the merchant is Jesus and the pearl is the church. And Christ was willing to lay down His all that He might purchase us for Himself. Now that's a wonderful truth. That lies at the very heart of our hope. The Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. But dear friends, that's not in this parable. It's wonderful when people want to see Christ in every passage of Scripture. But when you put Christ where He didn't put Himself, you don't honor Christ. Alright. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls." The central truth of the passage is not a lesson on Christ seeking His people and giving His all for them.

Furthermore, it must never be used to teach that we can enter the kingdom by purchasing an entrance with money or by good deeds. Someone says, "Ah, but the text says, that having found, he went, he sold, he bought it. We can buy into the kingdom." Now there was a time when multitudes were duped by the horrible practice of the church of Rome and its sale of "indulgences". And basically, an indulgence was a provision whereby, for so much money, you could pay for the release of someone out of purgatory by neutralizing the temporary punishment for their sin. And

this was one of the horrible abuses that brought that Augustinian monk to the fore. And in his debates with Tetzel, it is said that when Tetzel and others were at business, they would tell poor ignorant peasants that every time one of the coins fell on the top of the drum a soul was released from purgatory. And certainly, our Lord is not teaching that the kingdom of God can in any way be purchased by money or by the currency of our deeds that God would regard as payment in kind (our tears, our prayers, our repentance, our faith, our reformation of life). Whatever there is of real coinage in them, they have absolutely no worth in terms of purchasing a standing with God and an entrance into the kingdom.

And furthermore, it is certainly not intended to teach us the ways in which the growth of the pearl is a picture of the growth of the kingdom. You say surely no one would do that. I read from a commentator who is very helpful in some ways, but then he writes,

"If our suggestion regarding the cause and manner of the pearl's growth is correct [that an irritant goes into that bivalve or that oyster, and then it secretes things that envelop it, etc.], the kingdom of God in the Gospel of His Son was generated in the same way. The pearl and the pearl of great price have the same natural history. Some foreign, hurtful thing falls in the creature's life. Forthwith the irritation which that invader produces causes the creature to throw out and over it, the disturber, that which forms a covering around it, hiding, smothering, annihilating the originating evil, and constituting over it and in place of it a gem of the tenderest, gentlest beauty, impenetrable, imperishable, glorious. So sin, a corroding drop, a dark, deadly, vexing, torturing thing fell upon God's fair creation, threatening to inoculate it with a poison that should leaven the whole lump and change its beauty into corruption. But around the dark sin spot and because the sin spot was there, divine love showered down like the impalpable silver gathering on its object in the electro type embracing, surrounding...."

And he goes on to say that's a picture. Christ intended to give us a picture of how the kingdom grows. Now it's one thing that where the Bible teaches how the kingdom grows, we find an analogy or a simile in the activity of a mollusk, of an oyster, or a spider as John Bunyan does. He finds excellent analogies with spiders on the walls of kings and maidens brushing a dusty room. But to say that when Jesus said, "The kingdom is like unto....", that Jesus meant to teach in this parable how the kingdom develops--no, my friend, the parable was never given for that purpose.

If that's not what the parable was intended to teach, what is it intended to teach. Well, as I noted two weeks ago in our study of the parable of the hidden treasure, the common denominators in both parables are these: In both cases, a single object of supreme value is discovered. In the one a man discovers a treasure in a field. In the other, the seeking pearl merchant finds this pearl of exceeding great worth. In both cases, a single object of supreme value is discovered. And secondly, in both cases, the single object of supreme value is acquired at the cost of liquidating all other personal assets. In the case of the treasure, this man in his joy, goes and sells all that he has and buys the field. In the case of the pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. And the meaning of the parable is found essentially in that common denominator. And what is it? I give it to you as I did two weeks ago. The discovery of the great worth of Jesus Christ and the salvation that is in Him will always cause a sinner to dispense with anything and everything that would keep him from possessing Christ and the salvation offered in Him. That's the central teaching of this parable.

Go back over this parable and see if it fits. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls." Here's the man, here's the woman, the boy or a girl diligently seeking that which is good, noble, virtuous, seeking meaning in life, passionately desiring to know the answer to the most elementary questions (Why am I here? What happens when I leave?). Here's someone not immersed in sensuality and merely living off the end of his or her nose for the next personal, sensuous, temporal pleasure. Their mind and spirit has risen above that, and they are seeking goodly pearls. They are seeking that which is of worth intrinsically. And in that search, a discovery of Christ is made by the Spirit through the Word. And then what happens? Well, what happens is exactly what happened with this man seeking excellent pearls. The acquisition of the one pearl becomes the all-absorbing passion. That's the first thing that happens. When he found it, he went, he sold, he purchased.

This is the Philippian jailor whose one obsession, when he had been brought face to face with the Gospel in the power of the Spirit, surrounded with a demonstration of God's power in the physical realm, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" That's the one passion, so he opens his home to the Apostle and his companion. And in the wee hours of the morning, he sits with his household hanging on the Word of God. Why? Because the discovery of the pearl has been made. And now only one thing matters.

It's the Ethiopian eunuch who's down there in Ethiopia, finds no satisfaction in the pagan gods with which he was reared that are all around him. And he sees in the Scriptures of the Old Testament and in Yahweh, the God of Israel, something that looks like excellent pearls. There is something here not to be had there. And he becomes in some way or another a loose proselyte to the revelation of God in the Old Testament; makes the long trip from Ethiopia all the way up to Jerusalem to be at one of the stated feasts and to show he was not a formalist just trying to do his thing to ease his conscience. In his spare time on the way back in the rough ride in a chariot, he's holding a scroll and reading. Phillip comes and says, "What are you reading?" He says, "I'm reading here in Isaiah 53, but I don't know of whom he is speaking." It says, "Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this scripture, preached unto him Jesus." What happened? He discovered the Pearl of great price. And at that point nothing mattered but having Christ and making it known that he had found the Pearl. He said, "Here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? [I found the Pearl, and I want to be identified with Him.]" The kingdom has come.

It's Bunyan's Christian who has discovered from the book in his hands that the city he is in is doomed to destruction. And he's on his way to get rid of the burden on his back. And when people try to dissuade and discourage and distract him, the fingers go in his ears, and he cries out, "Life, life, eternal life!"--the grand obsession of the soul. The acquisition of the one Pearl became the all-absorbing passion with this man. And it's that way whenever God brings someone into the kingdom. He brings them in having persuaded them that what is there in the person and work and virtue and gifts and graces of the King Jesus is worthy of single-eyed pursuit, the all-absorbing passion.

Secondly, the acquisition of the one pearl at any cost is regarded as the only rational thing to do. You see, once this pearl merchant finds this one pearl of exceeding great price, there's something going on in the reckoning faculty of his mind. And he's come to this persuasion that the only rational thing to do is to get that pearl. And to get that pearl, he must liquidate all he's got at home, but that's the most reasonable thing in all the world. He obtains a bargain in that pearl. And when the Lord Jesus, by His

Spirit, is drawing a sinner to Himself, the Spirit of God through the Word always works a marvelous work of radical devaluation within the soul of the sinner. Up until the discovery of that one pearl, had you gone to him back from one of his merchant trips and said, "Hey John, I'd like to buy your vintage Corvette in the garage." He would have said, "No way, I mean I've nursed that thing and polished that thing. No way." "What about your Roger Maris baseball?" "No way am I going to part with that." I mean you couldn't dicker with him. These things were precious to him. But now suddenly, he comes home and he's ready to auction them off and sell the whole shootin' match, not because something snapped in his brain, but because he came to the rational conclusion, "That pearl is of such worth that I'd be stupid and crazy if I didn't liquidate my house, my Corvette, my Roger Maris baseball in order to get the pearl." Look at the text: "Having found one pearl of exceeding worth, he went, he sold, and he bought it." The kingdom of heaven is like that.

The Holy Spirit never reveals Jesus in such a way that you sit and dicker and make calculations, "Well, if I commit myself here, I'll hedge my bets here; I'll diversify my portfolio there so that if this doesn't pan out, I've still got something left." No, no! If you say you know Christ and He's the commodity that can in any way share your portfolio, you are deluded, my friend, utterly deluded. For Jesus the King of grace says, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a pearl merchant seeking excellent pearls, who when he found one pearl of exceeding great worth, he went and sold all."

The third thing we see is that the acquisition of the one pearl at the cost of all else is reckoned as an immeasurable gain. Not only did he come to the rational conviction that the pearl was worth all he possessed, but he's convinced he's gotten a good deal. No doubt, the merchant feels, "Man, I've got a windfall from this pearl." Why was he willing to part from it? Because he believed, as a merchant, it was in his best interest to part with the pearl to get this guy's stuff. Right? Isn't that what happens when you buy and sell and trade and barter. You go down to the local car place and look at a car, and it's got all the features. You believe it's in your best interest to part with so much money to get that hunk of tin. The man there believes that your money is worth parting with his hunk of tin; it will be in his best interest to relinquish the car. And you believe it's in your best interest to take it off his hands. Isn't that what we do in business exchange? This is a business deal. He went and found this one pearl of exceeding worth, and he said, "Look, it's my best interest to part with everything to have it." The merchant said, "It's in my best interest to take what you've got to part with it." They've both got the best of both worlds.

But now we realize the significance of it in the realm of the spiritual. When the Spirit of God has brought to the heart a discovery of Christ crucified, risen, standing in the plentitude of His grace and mercy, receiving sinners in that grace and in that mercy, the discovery of Christ is such that we never walk away talking about how much we gave up for Him, how much we sacrificed for Him. You couldn't come up to this fellow while he's admiring his pearl and say, "Aren't you shedding any tears? You don't have your Corvette in your garage anymore. What about your Micky Mantle memorabilia and your Stan Musial glove?" He would say,

"You don't understand, I've got this pearl. Do I miss my Corvette? Are you crazy? Don't come to sympathize with me that I've got no Corvette, that I've got to spend some time in the local boarding house for a while until I find a place where to live. Don't shed any tears for me because I've parted with my stuff. In parting with my stuff, I have this pearl of exceeding great worth."

William Taylor who expounds both of the parables together has captured this element so beautifully. He says,

"These parables teach us that the perception of the value of salvation in Christ makes a man happy to part with everything that is inconsistent with its possession. The merchant made a good investment when he bought the pearl. Even at such a price, he was getting more than he gave. And the finder of the treasure has no sadness in his heart when he sold all that he had to buy the field. The text says, 'For joy thereof....', of which multitudes lose sight, which perhaps the vast majority of readers and, I say, listeners never see is the gem of the parable of the hidden treasure. And if I might, I would take this gem and set it in the prominent place in the ring of my discourse."

And going back, then, to the treasure in the field, he says,

"The man did not regret the selling of all he had for the purchase of the field, nor the man who purchased the pearl of great price. He didn't go around whimpering about the sacrifice he was making, the self-denial he was practicing. He gave much, but he got far more. And the joy of getting the thing swallowed up in itself all the pain of his giving. Now it is in this that he truly resembles the true Christian convert."

Do you remember how the young ruler went away sorrowful, wedded to his possessions? Here we have the true explanation of his making that refusal. He had no adequate conception of the value of Christ and of His salvation. He says he had riches. No, the riches had him and he stood before Truth incarnate. He stood before Eternal Life incarnate and says, "What must I do to have eternal life?" And Christ says, "You must have Me as your treasure." He went away sorrowful because he had another treasure, and he had never seen the beauty and worth of the true treasure that was before him.

What's the central lesson of this parable? The central lesson is essentially what it is in the parable of the treasure hidden in the field. It is when the Spirit of God brings home to the heart of the sinner a saving discovery of Christ. Christ is reckoned to be of such exceeding worth that the whole of the heart goes out to him. Repentance is saying, "The stuff in my garage doesn't matter. The title to my 10-room house doesn't matter. I must have the pearl." Repentance is saying, "The approbation and approval and smiles of my peers don't matter. I'm ready to let the world know the Pearl is mine. And in that sense, I am the Pearl's. It has captured me. He has captured me."

Do we feel the loss of friends for Christ's sake? Of course we do, but not when we compare the gain of that loss to the joy of the discovery of Christ. We say no to every pleasure that must be had in the way of violating God's law, promoting the knowledge and communion with God and the advancement of the kingdom of God. With the Apostle Paul, we're ready to say, "I will eat no meat or drink no wine nor do anything whereby my brother is caused to stumble." The salvation of the souls of others: "My passion that others will come to discover this pearl of great price makes any pleasure of any kind in any way expendable. I found the Pearl, and I want others to possess the Pearl."

That's the teaching of the passage, and if it is, let me ask you as you sit here this morning, are you that wholesale pearl merchant? Have you seen in Christ what you are willing to embrace? Selling your own self-righteousness; saying with Paul, "All

that I've ever done in law-keeping and religious rituals is as dung that I might gain Christ." Christ can only be purchased as the pearl when you repudiate all of the rot and stink of your own self-righteousness, your own arrogant notions about true religion and what is of value and what is right and wrong, the rotten stuff of your own depraved thoughts. Are you ready to trash it that you might have Him in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. Your sins that can only disappoint you and leave a bad taste in the mouth of your soul--are you prepared to sell them that you might have the pearl?

Could I but show you the beauty and the worth of Christ, you know what would happen to every single unconverted person here? You'd be saved before you left this place this morning. If you could see for a moment the true worth of Jesus and all that is in Jesus, you'd say, "What a wretched, stupid fool I've been thinking I could find life, true joy, peace, satisfaction anywhere but in Him." And if the Spirit of God is pleased to take the Word of God and shine in your heart upon the face of Christ, you'll become another one of these merchants who goes, who sells, and who buys.

This Christ who says, "Come unto Me; I'll give you rest. If you thirst, come to Me and drink and I'll give you an artesian well of spiritual life. You'll never thirst. The water I give shall be in you a well of water springing up into everlasting life. I'm the bread of life. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood shall never die." Christ is all of that and more. And the reason you sit in unbelief is because you don't see that. All you see is a lump inside an oyster, an ugly-looking oyster. Did you ever see someone get excited about the outside of an oyster shell? It's ugly--dark ridges, sand worked in. As you're cleaning oysters before you crack them open, there's nothing pretty about them. That's all some of you see. We stand up here preaching Christ, and all you see is an oyster shell of words and notions that have no attraction to your heart. O my friend, cry to God that He will help you see the Pearl and it's worth, and your heart will run out to Him.

Well, I've sought to give an explanation of the basic elements of the parable, the identification and the basic meaning of the parable; now in the time that remains, the basic contrast between the two parables. Some of you have been waiting for this, I know, because you hold me to my promises. And I said in the introduction of the other parable that before we were done, we would address that area of dissimilarity, the basic contrast between the two parables. And the contrast is clear and lies on the very surface. In the case of the treasure, the man finds it. There's no indication he's a treasure hunter. He's not going out there with one of those wands over the sand hoping to find a few nickels or dimes someone dropped when they were half-drunk at a beach party. How he was there, we don't know. He may have been a hired hand; he may have been a share-cropper. But when he's not thinking about treasures, he discovers the treasure. In the case of the pearl merchant, he is in the business of seeking pearls. There's the obvious contrast.

And I believe what our Lord is pointing to in that contrast is giving the full spectrum of the different ways that God, by the Holy Spirit, brings people into the kingdom. For some people, the kingdom and all the blessings of that kingdom come to them as this treasure came to the man there in the field. It's not something they're thinking about; it's not something they're agitated about. God, as it were, breaks down out of the clear blue sky and apprehends them by His grace. In them, Isaiah 65:1 is fulfilled where God says, "I was found of them that sought Me not." The woman at the well--she's coming out to the well for one thing: to carry back water for herself and any in her

house. And before she leaves, she finds living water. Think of Zacchaeus. He's heard about the buzz and excitement about Jesus of Nazareth. The Scripture says he went up in a tree just to see. That's all he wanted. He wanted to be able to say the next day when people are all talking and saying, "I saw Him," "I saw Him too." All he's doing is wanting to get a look; he got something more. Jesus said, "Today is salvation come to your house." Their like the treasure. Their life is not in any way focused on seeking the things of God, yearning after something more noble and elevated and satisfying. Think of the dying thief. At the beginning of his time on the cross, the Bible says the thieves (both of them) cast the same reproaches into Jesus' face. In a couple of hours, he's ready to go to heaven: "Today, you shall be with Me in paradise." He found the Treasure hanging on a cross.

Now at the other end of the spectrum, you have those in whom the Spirit of God creates a yearning and a desire for something above and beyond the temporal. And they hardly know what it is for which they seek. And as the Spirit of God draws them out and elevates their desires, and they seek and search, and they go down a hundred different rabbit trails, eventually God brings them to discover the Pearl. Isn't that Nicodemus? He comes to Jesus by night; he probably didn't want to be known that he was interested. He talks; Jesus exposes his real need. But by the time we come to the end of John's Gospel, he's one of the two men that takes down the body of our Lord Jesus and shows his love for the pearl by washing it and wrapping it in clean cloths with spices. Think also of the Bereans who searched the Scriptures daily. They were merchants seeking goodly pearls, and they found the pearl of great price. Think of Lydia, the seller of purple, who is part of a ladies prayer meeting. She has yearning, a reaching out for far more than what she could find in her pagan environment back in her home town. And it says when Paul came and preached, "whose heart the Lord opened" like a flower opens to the sun.

And I believe our Lord has given us those two ends of the spectrum to cover everything in between. The kingdom comes to some like the treasure came to that man--unsought, unexpected. But it comes on the same terms as it came to the pearl merchant seeking goodly pearls, who finds one pearl of exceeding worth. Like the man with his treasure, so the pearl merchant with his pearl, he sold all to have it. So whatever the diversity of God's saving work may be in its details, one thing is the common denominator: if you're in the kingdom, Christ is your treasure; Christ is your unparalleled pearl of exceeding great worth.

Now in application, let me say these things. Number one: this contrast between the treasure and the pearl should be a source of encouragement to those who are like the pearl merchant. Some of you are like that pearl merchant. You've not been able to believe that all there is to life is all you can see with your eyeballs, what you can feel with your five senses, what people around you say is the meaning of life. You've not been able to buy into that. And sitting here this morning, you're very conscious of a yearning for something higher, more noble. And perhaps you've read in this philosophy or tried this religion and that. My friend, this passage should be of encouragement to you. God says, "You shall seek Me and you shall find Me when you search for Me with all your heart." That's the text illustrated in the pearl merchant. "You shall go and pray unto Me, and You shall seek Me and you shall find Me when you search for Me with all your heart." God says in Isaiah, "I was found of them that sought Me not." He says in Jeremiah, "I will be found of those that seek Me." Are you seeking? My friend, make sure you let no one pass off as a goodly pearl the great pearl of exceeding worth a cheap imitation. Go to your Bible and ask God, by the

Holy Spirit, to show you the exceeding worth of Jesus and all that He offers to sinners in Him.

The contrast should be an encouragement to those of you who are like the treasure finder. As I was praying over this in the earlier hours of this morning, I said, "Lord, could it be that sitting here there are faces I've never seen before? Could some of them be like that man who found the treasure?" Maybe you've come here just to satisfy some relative, some friend--curiosity. But while you sat here, in the hymns, in the reading of the Scripture, in the preaching, the mist is beginning to go away, and you're beginning to see, "Why, this man is saying, and the Bible says, and these people are saying in their prayers and praises, 'Christ is the answer, Christ is life, Christ is salvation, Christ is all in all.'" Is that what's happening? My friend, you can have the Pearl sitting there today. You can have the Treasure, the Treasure discovered, unsought for. But here you are, and, as it were, the dirt is beginning to be pulled back and you say, "The treasure is Christ. How could I have missed it so long?" He's yours if you will have Him; have in on His terms. If any man come after Jesus, say no to self, get out of the God business, take up your cross, and be willing to be identified with a despised and rejected Jesus and give yourself to Him in unqualified surrender, He will be yours. He will be yours here and now if you will but have Him.

Neither class, the one like the treasure finder, the other like the pearl merchant or any in between can take comfort until you have the Treasure and you have the Pearl. Notice, he sold all that he had, and he bought the field. Acquisition was everything. One commentator used a vivid analogy. If you were in a ship in the midst of a heaving, tossing, turbulent sea; all the powers of the wind seem to have broken loose, and you fear the boat is going to capsize unless you can find some sure anchor, the writer said, "If the anchor chain stops one foot from the bottom, it may as well never have been cast. It's when the times the anchor sinks into the ocean floor that the sea can batter the ship, but it remains stable." My friend, don't stop a foot short of being anchored to Christ. Being anchored to Christ is everything. The drowning man who cries for help and the life preserver is sent to him, and his hand falls six inches short of grasping that donut, which is his way of escape from death, he drowns as much as if none ever heard his plaintiff cry for help. My dear friend, acquisition is everything in the Gospel. "As many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His name."

And then none should be comforted who think they've discovered and acquired the Treasure or the costly Pearl who've not sold all that they have to acquire it. If you've not been willing to part with anything and everything that is an impediment to having Christ, you are none of Christ's. Do you hear that? Am I saying you must relinquish your title to every piece of clothing, every piece of property, every commodity, every stock, every bond, every insurance policy? Of course not, the Bible doesn't teach that. What the Bible teaches and what I'm seeking to articulate is that you must be prepared to part with anything and everything that keeps you from having Christ on His terms. In the case of the young ruler, it was his stocks and his bonds and his cash in his pockets. His money was his idol, and Jesus said, "Smash you your idol; then you'll have me as your God and your Savior." For some of you, it could be you won't get saved until you're ready to relinquish your--what comes to your mind? Unless you're ready to--what comes to your mind? Then for you, that may be the hinge on which your eternal destiny turns. You know what it is. You know who it is. You

know who she is. Whatever it is, don't you comfort yourself that you have Christ as the treasure and Christ as the pearl unless you have Him on His terms.

And child of God, you who have by grace acquired the Treasure and found the Pearl, you know the only way to maintain a proper relationship to everything else in your world is to constantly grow in your estimation of the Treasure and the worth of the Pearl. Now you think about that. When do you hang most loosely to the things of this life and enjoy the most warm, intimate, soul-refreshing communion with God in Jesus Christ? When do you enjoy it the most? Is it not when Christ has no rival in any area of your life. When you can say with Paul, "For to me to live is Christ. Life means Christ to me." Then and only then will death be gain because you've already let loose of any idolatrous attachment to anything that will be taken from you in death. You see, death can't be gain to you if all you count worthy is here. That will be loss to you. "For to me to live is Christ; to die is gain." Why? Because I've got nothing to lose when I go to be with Him. To depart and be with Christ is gain. Why? Because there's nothing of any idolatrous worth to which I cling that would be otherwise loss to me. If there's any secret to the flourishing Christian life, surely it's here. When the Treasure grows in our estimation each time we look at it, each time we open it and finger its content, when the Pearl grows in our estimation each time we look at it, each time we hold it up in different lights, as Christ becomes increasingly precious, so we understand more and more of what it is to live with joy in the acquisition of the Treasure at any cost and the Pearl at any cost. May God make us a congregation of people who are like that.

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