

"THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE"

Matthew 13:44-50

Don Fortner

In these seven verses, we have the parables of the treasure hidden in a field, the pearl of great price, and the net cast into the sea. Each of these three parables is full of rich, spiritual instruction for all who are taught of God.

The Parable of the Treasure Hidden in a Field is Designed To Teach Us How Precious, Highly Valued and Esteemed, and Greatly Loved God's Elect are To the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 44). I cannot begin to describe as I ought the love of Christ for God's elect, his chosen body and bride, the church. But the picture before us in this parable, simple as it is, beautifully portrays that love which moved the Son of God to redeem us with his own precious blood.

The Treasure hidden in a field is the church of God's elect. Yes, we are the Lord's treasure, the portion of his inheritance, the apple of his eye, and the jewels of his crown! Though in ourselves, by nature and by birth, we are nothing but sinners, worthless and useless, because of God's sovereign love and distinguishing grace, we are precious in his sight - So precious that he has sacrificed men and nations for us (Isa. 43:4; Ex. 19:5-6; Deut. 32:8-10; Psa. 135:4). God's elect are so precious, as the objects of his love and grace, that he gave his own darling Son to redeem and save us (John 3:16; Gal. 2:21; Tit. 2:14; I John 3:16; I John 4:9-10). Roll this thought around in your heart for a while. You, my brother, my sister in Christ - You are the treasure of the triune God!

The elect are like a treasure hidden in a field. The field in which God's elect have been hidden is the world and the nations of it. Throughout the Scriptures, God's elect are spoken of as a people scattered among, chosen from, redeemed out of, and called from the nations of the world. The treasure was found by Divine election (II Thess. 2:13-14). The treasure is hidden by Divine predestination and providence. God scattered and hid his elect among the nations of the world: After the fall (Gen. 3:24), after the flood (Gen. 9:20-27), after the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). This scattering of the elect, hiding them in the earth, was God's work of judgment, that he might gather them in everlasting mercy, love, and grace (Jer. 30:11; Ezek. 11:16-18; Gen. 49:10; Isa. 11:10; 56:8; 66:18).

The Man in this parable is the God-man our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He sacrificed everything he had that he might obtain the object of his love, his bride, the church, which he treasures above all things (II Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:5-8). He did it with joy! So great is his love for his elect that he joyfully came into this world to suffer the wrath of God for us to save us (Heb. 12:2). There was no joy in his sufferings. But he endured the cross, despising the shame for the joy set before him, the promised joy of seeing his elect seed with him in glory!

He bought the field that he might get the treasure hidden in the field! Do not let that fact disturb you. Do you imagine that there is any inconsistency here. Our Lord Jesus, as a Man, bought the world that he might save his elect. This parable does not teach universal redemption. Not on you life! It teaches particular, effectual redemption. Christ did not make atonement for the world (the field). He made atonement for his elect (the treasure). But as a man, he bought the right to rule the field and to dispose of the field as he will (Psa. 2:8; John 17:2; II Pet. 2:1). When he has gathered his treasure out of this field, he will burn the field, destroy all that is evil in it, and make this field anew, making it a suitable habitation for his saints.

The parable of the treasure hidden in the field is designed to show us a picture of Christ's love for his bride, the church of God's elect.

"Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou my God shouldst die for me?"

The parable of the Pearl of great price is intended to teach us how precious, highly valued and esteemed, and greatly loved the Lord Jesus Christ is to God's elect (vv. 45-46). Christ is the believer's portion. "Unto you therefore which believe, he is precious" (I Pet. 2:7).

Some people object to the use of terms like "awakened sinner" and "sensible sinners." Certainly, the terms may be pressed to mean more than I intend by them; but I do not know how else to describe the merchantman in this parable than this: He represents a sinner who has been awakened to and made sensible of his need of salvation and acceptance with God. I do not say that he is regenerated, saved, or converted. But he is a person who knows he must meet God in eternity and he seeks to prepare for that awesome event.

Such men and women seek after a great variety of things which, at first sight, seem to them to be "goodly pearls:" moral reformation, legal righteousness, religious ritualism, a profession of faith, church membership, works of zeal, devotion, and piety. For those things they are willing to exchange many things and imagine that they have made a good trade, until Christ is revealed in all the fulness of his glory and grace. Oh, when the seeking sinner finds the sovereign Savior, he sees in the crucified Son of God everything he wants and needs (I Cor. 1:30; Col. 3:11; Eph. 1:3). Believing Christ, the sinner says, "He is precious!" He is willing to part with anything and everything for Christ: Sinful self, self-righteous self, worldly honor and wealth, family and friend (Mk. 8:34-37; Lk. 14:25-33).

Gracious Lord, incline Thine ear,
My request vouch safe to hear;
Hear my never ceasing cry,
Give me Christ, or else I die!

Wealth and honor I disdain,
Earthly comforts all are vain;
These can never satisfy,
Give me Christ, or else I die!

Lord, deny me what Thou wilt,
Only ease me of my guilt,
Suppliant at Thy feet I lie,
Give me Christ, or else I die!

All to whom Christ is revealed in the fulness of his saving grace and glory willingly give up all things to win him and be found in him (Phil. 3:7-15).

This parable, simple as it is, explains the life and behavior of all true Christians. The believer is what he is and does what he does, because he is thoroughly convinced that "Christ is all." He comes out of

the world. He says, "No" to the lusts of the flesh. He puts off the old man and puts on the new. He hates sin and pursues righteousness. He counts all things but loss for Christ, because he sees Christ to be the Pearl of great price that he must have, for which he gladly sells all that he has.

This parable, simple as it is, also explains the life and behavior of lost, unregenerate church members. Some who have for years professed to be Christians are always halting between two opinions. They flinch from decisiveness. They shrink from taking up their cross and following Christ. They wear his name, but not his garments. They venture nothing for Christ. They simply cannot make up their minds to sell all for him. They have resolved to do so a hundred times. But they cannot bring themselves to do it. Why? The answer is obvious - They do not yet see that Christ is the Pearl of great price. He is not precious to them, because they do not trust him. Therefore, they cannot and will not forsake all that they may have him. They may sing with their lips, "Take the world, but give me Jesus," but everyday they say with their lives, "If it comes to that, I'll take the world, somebody else can have Jesus!"

The parable of the Pearl of great price is intended to show us that Christ is incomparably precious to all true believers. He is the Pearl of great price for which all who are born of God sell all, that we may have him.

The parable of the net cast into the sea was given to show us the true nature of Christ's visible church and kingdom in this world (vv. 47-50). The preaching of the gospel is like the casting of a great net into the sea of this world. It is our business to cast the net. But as a net cast into the sea gathers a great multitude of fish, some good and some bad, so the preaching of the gospel gathers into Christ's visible church both genuine believers and carnal professors, both regenerate souls and unregenerate, both humble possessors of faith and hypocritical professors of faith. There is sure to be a time when the good fish are separated from the bad; but that is God's doing, not ours. And he will not do it until the end of the world. I want to show you three things clearly revealed in this parable.

All the churches of Christ in this world are mixed assemblies of good and bad fish. Throughout these parables, our Lord repeatedly stresses the point that there are good hearers and bad hearers, tares and wheat, and good fish and bad fish. Why? He means for us to understand that there is no perfect church, no perfect body of believers in this world. If we try to make the church perfect and pure by separating the bad from the good, we will both be disobedient to our Master and instruments of great harm to his people.

We must never be satisfied with an outward profession of faith and outward church membership. You may be in the net, and yet not be in Christ. Multitudes have been buried in the waters of baptism who have never been crucified with Christ. Thousands around the world regularly eat and drink the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, who never feed upon Christ by faith.

The true character of every person's religion will soon be revealed (vv. 48-50). When the Lord God draws the net to shore, he will gather the good and throw away the bad. There will be an eternal separation between the wicked and the just. There is a heaven for the just and a furnace of fire for the wicked. "These plain words need more belief and consideration than exposition." (Richard Baxter)

Have you bought the Pearl of Great Price? Are you in Christ?

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