

The Parables Of Matthew 13 (Part Seven): The Parable Of The Pearl

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The first four parables of Matthew 13 are darkened by an ominous cloud. In contrast, the last four cast light on the assurance of a positive future for the saints. In this second of the chapter's third pair of parables, Jesus reveals more secrets to His disciples regarding the high value God places on the church. The Parable of the Pearl (verse 45) particularly reveals the high cost to God of acquiring potential members of His Kingdom.

Until we are baptized members of God's church with the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, we cannot understand the full meaning and purpose of God's plan. As Asaph writes, "When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me—until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end" (Psalm 73:16-17). This parable helps us understand God's perspective.

Between the Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Parable of the Pearl, we can notice this distinction: The Treasure is made up of units of precious things, such as coins and gems of various kinds, although they are collectively one treasure. The Pearl, however, is a single object. These two illustrations—both of which conclude at the same place, the completion of the purchase—represent different aspects of the same truths: the *costliness* of the Treasure or Pearl, and the *joy* of the Purchaser.

1. Whom does the merchant represent? Matthew 13:45-46.

Comment: The merchant is seriously and deliberately searching the world to secure the best and costliest gems. It is his livelihood, and he is diligent to travel extensively because he knows his efforts will be rewarded when he finds the best and purchases them. Since Christ is the One who seeks the sinner (Luke 19:9-10; John 6:44), the merchant *cannot* represent the members of God's church (Romans 3:11). The Shepherd seeks the sheep, not vice versa.

The use of the word "seeking" (Matthew 13:45) helps identify the merchant as Christ, as it means "to depart from one place and arrive at another." Jesus did this Himself to pay the price for the pearl. He departed from heaven and arrived on earth to complete His mission (Philippians 2:6-7; II Corinthians 8:9). He gave up everything—He sold all—to possess us!

2. What is the significance of the pearl? Same verses.

Comment: Unlike other gems, pearls are produced by a living organism, an oyster, as the result of an injury. It usually begins forming around a grain of sand or an egg of some parasite that invaded the oyster. The oyster protects itself by layering the irritant with nacre (mother-of-pearl) until, out of pain and suffering, it forms an object of great beauty. The offending party actually becomes a gem of great worth.

In a similar way, spiritually, we are an irritant, a parasite due to our nature and sins (Romans 3:23-26). However, because God loves us, we are covered by the blood of Jesus Christ, and gradually, we can become a thing of beauty, clothed with the righteousness of Him who bought us (Romans 3:24-26; Ephesians 2:13). As long as the pearl—the church—remains in the oyster—the world—it has no value. In fact, the pearl has no real intrinsic worth; its value resides in the immense cost paid for it.

3. How does grace apply in this parable?

Comment: The doctrine of God's grace is essential in understanding this parable (II Corinthians 9:15; Romans 6:23). The merchant is willing to buy the pearl at an exorbitant cost. No one can buy salvation or the Kingdom of God or eternal life for himself. Grace would not be grace if one were able to barter with God (Luke 7:41-42). According to Scripture, we have no righteousness, no talents, no goods, nothing that is of any value in purchasing such a priceless gift from God (Isaiah 64:6). Peter's denunciation of Simon Magus clearly shows that no one can buy what belongs to God (Acts 8:17-24).

Further, we do not choose Christ but He selects us (John 15:16; Luke 19:10). Since He is the merchant, the price paid was His life, and the church is the pearl. The church is one body (Ephesians 4:4), composed of those He has sought out through the ages to be a habitation of Christ by His Spirit and who will be His bride at His return.

The Pearl presents a wonderful picture of the purchase of the church in preparation for the Kingdom of God. It is encouraging to know that Jesus does not seek us in reluctant fulfillment of duty. Nor is He groping in the dark, hoping that we will respond to His plea, but He seeks us out with an efficient, organized, pre-planned goal in mind. He pursues us as a man courts a woman to be his bride, willing to spill His own blood as her purchase price (Acts 20:28). What greater price could have been paid for the church than the life of Jesus Christ, the perfect sacrifice?