

The Parables of Jesus

The Kingdom Parables

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price

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The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price is the second of the hidden parables—so-called because Jesus tells them only to His disciples. They are found only in Matthew 13. There are certainly direct similarities between this parable and the Parable of the Hidden Treasure that precedes it. But there are also differences. (For more information, see the previous article in this series, "The Parable of the Hidden Treasure" <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/par6treasure.htm>.)

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price

In the following words, Matthew records The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

Matthew 13:45-46

Symbols and Explanation

As we have seen with some other parables, Jesus does not give a direct, detailed explanation of this parable. Nevertheless, using the Bible, it is not difficult to understand the symbols.

I. A Merchant Man: This is a good translation of the Greek. It refers to a man dealing in goods, especially one who travels in his business. As we have seen before, Jesus, in Matthew 13:37, said He was the sower in that parable. Without a good reason to think otherwise, the symbolism carries through to the parables that follow. Jesus is the man in this parable also. He is a merchant who is seeking. In Luke 19:10, Jesus says, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Merchant Man=Jesus Christ

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II. The One Pearl of Great Price: In seeking goodly pearls, the merchant finds the one pearl of great price. Pearls, of course, come from mollusks. The best pearls come from either oysters or fresh water mussels. They are considered gemstones and can have great value. But, unlike other gems, they are organic, being made of layers of calcium carbonate held together by a protein called conchiolin. Interestingly, and possibly intended in this parable, is the fact that pearls come from under the water; they are lowly, and in Jewish culture, have unclean origins (God told the Jews to consider anything from the water that did not have fins and scales to be an abomination—Leviticus 11:9-12). Yet, they are brought above the water and freed from the unclean flesh and elevated in worth to the status of a precious gem. Colossians 2:11-13 says of saved sinners, "In whom [Christ] also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses." Notice: from buried in baptism to raised; from dead in sins in uncircumcised flesh to circumcised of that flesh. Yes, a pearl is a very good picture of God's people. But it is God's people united.

This parable makes a point that, while the merchant was seeking beautiful pearls, it was the one pearl that he bought. I will stress the words of unity in these verses: "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;) And hath raised us up *together*, and made us sit *together* in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.... For he is our peace, who hath made both *one*, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain *one new man*, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in *one body* by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.... In whom all the building fitly framed *together* groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:4-6; 14-16; 21). And, "For as we have many members in *one body*, and all members have not the same office [*praxis*—"practice," "action"; NOT "office"]: So we, being many, are *one body* in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Romans 12:4-5).

Thus, we see that the pearl of great price is the one body of God's elect people, His spiritual assembly called in the Bible the *ekklēsia* (usually incorrectly translated "church").

Pearl of great price=the *ekklēsia*

III. Sold...Bought: The pearl is said to be of great price or extreme value. As sinners, it can be difficult for us to see how this can be a picture of us. After all, doesn't God call the foolish, weak, base, and despised (1 Corinthians 1:27-28)? True. But our sin debt is so great that it takes a great price to free us. The merchant man, Jesus Christ, sells all that he has to buy us.

First Corinthians 6:20 and 7:23 tell us that we have been bought with a price. What price? Philippians 2:5-8 tells us, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." For our sake, Jesus gave up His heavenly privileges and became a lowly man, and then gave up even His earthly life to purchase our salvation. We also read, "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:12-14). Titus 2:14 tells us of Jesus Christ, "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." And Peter says, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Sold...Bought=Jesus giving up His heavenly privileges and His life to purchase or redeem His elect people, the *ekklēsia*

The Common Misinterpretation

I will let Baptist preacher A. W. Pink explain the misinterpretation:

The general conception of its meaning is this! Christianity is likened unto one who earnestly desired and diligently sought salvation. Ultimately his efforts were rewarded by his finding Christ, the Pearl of great price. Having found Him, as presented in the Gospel, the sinner sold all that he had: that is to say, he forsook all that the flesh held dear, he abandoned his worldly companions, he surrendered his will, he dedicated his life to God; and in that way, secured his salvation. The awful thing is that this interpretation is the one which, substantially, is given out almost everywhere throughout Christendom today.

The Prophetic Parables of Matthew 13, "The Parable of the Pearl," http://www.pbministries.org/books/pink/Parables/parables_06.htm

Briefly, the problem with this interpretation is that it is precisely backwards. Sinners do not naturally seek Christ (John 6:44; Romans 3:10-11). Instead, Christ seeks and saves those who are lost (Luke 19:10). And sinners have absolutely nothing of any value that they can possibly use to obtain Christ (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:12). Further, and central to the Gospel message, is the fact that God gives Jesus Christ to us as a free gift (Romans 5:15-18). He doesn't ask or want payment from us (Romans 3:24; 8:32; 4:4; 11:6). In other words, the common teaching concerning the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price runs contrary to the very Gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. By putting a price on God's free gift, it adds a human work to and consequently denies the completed work of Jesus Christ. It is thus exposed as a doctrine of antichrists (see "Are You Following the Doctrines of Antichrists?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/antichrist.htm>)).

The Lesson of the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price

Before explaining the lesson of this parable, I will contrast it with the Parable of the Treasure. In the Parable of the Treasure, we see Christ's love for us in His buying the world in order to get us so that we could be called out of the world. The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price shows us Christ's love toward us in redeeming us from our sins. It is also worth noting that a treasure is made of diverse things, picturing the manifold origins of God's people. The pearl is one, exhibiting the unity of the *ekklēsia* before God.

In the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price, we are to see that we did not seek and find Christ. He sought and found us. We paid nothing for Him. He paid all for us. We are naturally unclean sinners, but because

of Christ's sacrifice, we are a sinless gem in God's sight. And we are to see the unity we have with our fellow Christians, even those we have never met, because we are all one in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

Application of the Parable to Our Lives

If we understand the great price that Jesus Christ paid for us, and how precious we are in His sight, it should follow that we will not take our calling lightly. We will strive to show our unity with fellow believers (but not foolishly think that those who believe another gospel are at one with us). And, very importantly, we will remember that we were bought with a price. In great joy, Jesus gave His all for us. We are not our own: "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (1 Corinthians 6:19).

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same [practice]: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

Romans 12:1-5

The next parable in this series will be the Parable of the Net.