

The Pearl of Great Price

In my last article we looked at Jesus' parable of the hidden treasure. The "treasure" is the kingdom of heaven, i.e., God the King's rule over every aspect of our lives. The primary point of the parable is that the kingdom of heaven is worth every sacrifice. Today we come to the second of two parables that I want to look at in this series of articles: the parable of the pearl of great price (or great value). Look with me now in verses 45-46:

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value went and sold all that he had and bought it." I noted for us last time that any language of "buying" a field or a pearl does not mean that we can purchase our right standing with God. We can only be right with God based on the perfect and finished work of Jesus Christ. But that truth is worth every sacrifice. As we compare this parable with the parable of the hidden treasure there's a slight but noticeable difference between the two. In the first parable the man *stumbles* upon the treasure sticking partially out of the ground. In this second parable, this man goes *in search* of the fine pearls. In his search he finds more than he could have ever imagined.

As we think about these two differences in light of God's salvation plan, it's true that some people may seem to simply *stumble* upon the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For example, someone may have been invited to a church service and they didn't even really want to go. They believe that they already have everything in their life under control so who needs religion. But, because they were invited by someone they care about, they reluctantly decide to accept the invitation. At that worship service—according to God's perfect plan and timing—that person hears the gospel preached, realizes for the first time that it's the greatest news that he's ever heard or imagined, and that very day he gets on his knees and prays for God to forgive all his sins and save his soul.

In another scenario, someone may have spent a large amount of time in a study of all of the world's major religions to see what each one has to offer. In his search, this person comes to discover that every other religion, except Christianity—in one form or another—is based on doing more good works than bad works. In other words, if you perform, hopefully, you'll meet the required standards of whatever god that's offering eternal bliss. In contrast to this, it's *only* Christianity that says, "You can't meet God's holy and perfect standard by your own works because you're a sinner and you're incapable. Only God himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, has *obeyed perfectly* and given himself as a blood sacrifice to atone for sin." Even still, at this point it's only academic.

As our story unfolds, this person is invited to a church service. He may be more willing to go than the previous person if only because of his religion studies. And he goes. The worship service is confusing and even awkward but he's willing to wait to hear the sermon. The pastor steps into the pulpit; he's unimpressive in nearly every way; his hair is unkempt; his tie is more than a little crooked; beads of sweat are building up on his forehead because the air conditioner has stopped working. But he preaches and the Holy Spirit is powerfully at work and this man hears something that he never expected to hear; something he's never heard before; not like this. It's hard to contain his emotions; this is the greatest news ever and he comes to believe that it's worth *every sacrifice* to have the kingdom of heaven. Only later will he discover that any desire for God is only by the grace of God who gives us a new heart and ears to hear his word. This person is so excited about God's free gift of salvation!

Going back to our text, scholars teach us that in the ancient world pearls would be primarily obtained from the Persian Gulf although some came from the Indian Ocean. Only the very rich could afford them. A person could get rich dealing in pearls. In that day, at least for a time, pearls were as valuable as gold. Interestingly, this merchant would have already had a number of pearls. But in this case, he finds something that outshines and is of greater value than anything that he already has and he sells everything so that he can have that pearl of great price.

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