

Matthew 13:44-46

When our daughter was a little toddler, she loved “story time” before bed. In her big book of Bible Stories she had her favorites, and the one that she loved the best was not David and Goliath, or the Birth of Jesus, or any of the stories of His miracles; it was our story for today--Jesus’ parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price. But it’s not because she loved pearls and treasure so much. She loved this story best because of how her mother read the story to her. The book was wrong. It said that Jesus is the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price. But when her mother came to that part of the story she said, “And you, Sarah, you are the hidden treasure, you are the pearl of great price.” And without fail these words always brought the biggest smile to her little face.

Friends, if you in your life have been reading the book incorrectly, that is about to change. Today you will hear the story read the way God wants you to hear it. And then you, too, can carry with you perhaps a smile on your face, and one always in your heart.

The way that most understand these two parables is the way that our daughter’s Bible Story book explained them. Jesus is the hidden treasure; He is the pearl of great price. And because this is who Jesus is to us, we must be willing to give up everything else in our life in order to obtain Jesus for ourself. There is nothing more important than grasping Jesus. There is no treasure of higher value than Him. There is no costlier pearl. What Christian would not agree with this? Of course we agree! “Jesus, Priceless Treasure,” we sing. From our perspective, from our point of view Jesus is the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price.

But these parables are not from our perspective, they are from God’s. They are parables showing God’s point of view, not ours. And those Christians who do not understand this will never, really, be free from the curse of the Law. They will always have a troubled conscience and be unsure of their salvation. Because who among us grasps Jesus the way we should? Who among us truly gives up enough of what we have so that we have Jesus most of all? In the parables, the man sold all he had to buy the field containing the hidden treasure, and the merchant sold all he had to buy the pearl of great value. Is this you? Is this me? Not even for one hour! We never put Jesus first. We like to say that we do, but we fail continually. So do we have Jesus? If we are always falling short of being the man and the merchant in the parables, then aren’t we also falling short of obtaining Jesus for ourself?

Friends, you and I cannot buy Jesus like a man buys a field or a merchant buys a pearl. We cannot obtain Jesus. It’s not that we grasp Him; He is the one who grasps you. From God’s perspective the treasure and pearl are not Jesus, they are you. The way God looks at these parables, and the way He wants us to understand them, is that God gave up everything He had; He gave up His only-begotten Son in order to purchase you for Himself. In the eyes of God you are a treasure, you are a priceless pearl.

Now you do realize what this means...when God found us we were covered, buried in mud and slime. The treasure was in a field buried under the dirt. The pearl came up from the muck and mire at the bottom of the sea. And that’s us. If we think we are so precious because we are shining examples of good behavior, then we are ignoring where we came from. “We were buried (dead) in our sins... having no hope and without God in the world,” says St. Paul. We were junk, garbage, nothing but wretched sinners.

And yet “one man’s junk is another man’s treasure.” Even though “all our righteous deeds are but filthy rags,” as Isaiah says, yet to God you are a treasure. If you do not think much of yourself, for

whatever reason, something you've done, how others treat you--after kneeling in the dirt with the poor Publican, lift up your eyes and hear what God has to say: You are precious to Me, of great value; you are a treasure, a pearl of great price.

But you and I are not valuable in our own right. Your value comes from what God gave up to have you. Car values go up and down. So do home values. Stocks, commodities, even the dollar--their value fluctuates. But not yours. Your value is set, marked in blood--Jesus' blood. God gave up His Son for you. He sent Him to the cross on your behalf. God's beloved Son suffered and died, spilling His precious blood in agony for no other reason than this--that you now belong to God through your baptism into Christ, that He now claims you for Himself, that you may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom...in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

Your value is determined, it's set by the cross of Christ. Your value before God does not go up when you're here in church, and go down when you are disobedient. He does not see you as a priceless pearl one day, and the next as junk to be gotten rid of...even though we often treat His Commandments like junk. God is not like us. He does not change His mind and alter His Word. You are not some passing fad with Him. He sought you, Christ died for you, He purchased you. He will never grow weary of you. To Him you are always a hidden treasure and a precious pearl.

Now do you realize that this very day in Christian churches all across our land, this same text is being preached, but how many--really, how few are hearing that they are treasures and pearls to God--that He gave up His Son to have them for His own! So many will leave the House of God today thinking that they must do a better job of grasping Jesus. Hearing how Jesus is the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price, they will resolve to seek Jesus better in their life, to strive more and more to keep Jesus in their heart. But these people, these hearers are looking to their own actions, to what they must do. Believing Jesus to be the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price, their focus will be on what they are doing to grasp Him ever so tightly. They will live this week, not in the freedom of the Gospel, but under the demands of the Law. But salvation comes, not by works of the Law which we must do, but by God's grace in Christ alone.

Into your ears today God is placing His great truth--that you are His treasures and pearls, that He grasps you through His Word of Promise, that He seeks you for His own again and again because we are always forsaking Him, that your place with Him is not gained by what you do--not by your seeking and grasping--but by what He has done, and does, for you in Christ Jesus, that He forgives you day after day, not because of what you give up for Him, but because He gave up His Son to the cross for you. Even on those days when you and I act, not like His treasures, but like junk, He never stops forgiving you for Jesus' sake. Which is why He places into your mouth, here at His altar, the very body and blood of Him who died for you. Would He give that precious body and blood to junk? He does not cast this pearl to swine. He gives Christ to you, sinful though you are, but forgiven in Jesus, and thus treasures and pearls to Him.

You do not have to be a little toddler to appreciate and love these parables of Jesus. The great truth He gives here is for toddlers, yes, but also for teenagers, for grown men and women, for the elderly, for those newly baptized, for those about to die. His great truth is for those who hear His Word in Africa, and in the uttermost parts of the earth, and for those who hear His Word in the small town of Augusta. His great truth is for you. You, dear friend, dear sinner, who came from the mud and slime, who loves God and yet struggles to show your love, who fails daily, as I also do, to grasp Jesus as we should--you are a treasure and pearl of great value to God. There is nothing He values more than you. He gave up His Son, Jesus, for you. And now you are His own...forever. Amen.

