

Matthew 13: 45 & 46; “The Merchant Man Keeps Seeking”, Session # 2 on the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price, Presented by Pastor Paul Rendall on February 19th, 2023, in the Adult Sunday School.

Matthew 13: 45 & 46 – “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

Review

1. 1st – Who is the Merchant Man, and What is he Seeking?

The Merchant Man is the person who is seeking the best and most beautiful things that life has to offer from all that God has made or given. This merchant man here in this Parable was seeking beautiful pearls, Jesus says. As to what this represents, we can say that in seeking for beautiful pearls he was seeking for things most precious. He is seeking for things of great and lasting beauty and value. He is seeking to have joy and delight in having all these pearls to himself. That is, he was seeking for the things of this world which God has made or that he could experience in relation to what God had made or given him in life. He was seeking to find long lasting joy in the experience of having them or owning them.

A merchant is a usually a person whose business it is to buy and resell merchandise. He would travel about the country, perhaps to many countries, looking for items to buy and then he sells them for a profit. In this way he becomes rich. This particular merchant, however, spent his time in seeking for fine pearls to own them. In this respect he appears to be a collector or gatherer, someone like Solomon was, when he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes. He wanted to have or to accumulate everything which would be of great personal benefit to himself; all that which would be of great and lasting value to himself in his having them or owning them.

Ecclesiastes 2: 1-11 – “I said in my heart, Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure; but surely, this also was vanity. I said of laughter—“Madness!”; and of mirth, “What does it accomplish?” I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives. I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds. So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done And on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.”

So, if we were going to list all the things which Solomon sought which would be compared to the beautiful pearls which the merchant man of our Parable was looking for, what would they be?

Let’s list them.

1. Mirth and Pleasure. Verse 1
2. Laughter (Madness) Being giddy about your enjoyment of life. Verse 2
3. Wine (Being wisely guided with wisdom when you used it) Verse 3

4. Making great works (houses, vineyards, orchards, and fruit trees, water pools) Verses 4-6
5. Having male and female servants. (In our day it would be owning the latest and best appliances, or automobiles) Verse 7
6. Gathering silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces (this no doubt would include pearls or valuable gems) Verse 8a
7. Male and female singers and musical instruments of all kinds. Verse 8b

Now, we see that Solomon did have joy and delight and pleasure in pursuing these things. They were things which brought satisfaction for a time. There was value in them for awhile. But he knew that ultimately that these things were vanity. And so he sought further to know things about God and the meaning of life.

Matthew Henry says: “All the children of men are busy, seeking goodly pearls: one would be rich, another would be honorable, another would be learned; but the most are imposed upon, and take up with counterfeits for pearls.”

2nd – The Merchant Man keeps Seeking for what has the Greatest Value.

Ecclesiastes 3: 9-15 – “What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God. I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him. That which is has already been, and what is to be has already been; and God requires an account of what is past.”

So Solomon is thinking about the labor of men, and what they profit from their labors. He has seen that God gives men tasks with which he would have them occupied. And he has seen that God is so great that He will make everything beautiful in its time. He has put eternity in each man’s heart because they are created in His own image and likeness. But Solomon has discovered that men will not be able to find out God’s work in what He does, from beginning to end. That is, men will seek to understand God’s great purposes in respect to their particular life, but it will be something that they will not entirely understand without Divine revelation. God would have every man rejoice and do what is good in their lives. And He would have them to be satisfied with what He gives in terms of eating and drinking and enjoying all the good that comes to them from their labor. Solomon in his searching for what was true and most valuable in life, came to know that God gives all of these good things in life to them, so that they might fear before Him. Because every man will have to render an account to God of what they have done.

Today’s Lesson

3rd – The Merchant Man Keeps Seeking until he Finds the Pearl of Great Price.

Ecclesiastes 7: 27 & 28 – “Here is what I have found,’ says the Preacher, adding one thing to the other to find out the reason, which my soul still seeks but I cannot find: One man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all these I have not found. Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, But they have sought out many schemes.”

Solomon had sought pleasure and satisfaction in his companionship and marriage with his 1,000 women; his foreign wives and his concubines, but he had not found it. He had not found a truly God-fearing woman

among them. One man among a thousand he said He did find. I believe that this One whom he found was the Pearl of Great Price, our Lord Jesus Christ.

John Gill says – “By this one of a thousand, is meant the, Messiah, the Wisdom of God, he sought for, Ecclesiastes 7:25; and now says he found; to whom he looked for peace, pardon, and atonement, under a sense of his sins; who is the messenger, an interpreter, one among a thousand; yea, who is the Chief among ten thousands, Job 33:23; who is superior to angels and men, in the dignity of his person; in the perfection, purity, and holiness of his nature; in the excellency of his names; in his offices and relations; and in his concern in the affairs of grace and salvation; and who is to be found by every truly wise and gracious soul that seeks him early and earnestly, in the word and ordinances, under the illumination and direction of the blessed Spirit.

But you will say to me – I thought that Solomon found the Lord when he was a young lad, when he prayed to God for wisdom, and God gave it to him. Yes, that was so. But still even though he knew the Lord from an early age, he still had many things to search for, and discover, and learn about life. This is why he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes. He knew God, but in his search for things and people who would bring him ultimate satisfaction in life, he ended up falling into many sins. And thus, he had to repent and come back to God later in his life.

The truth of the matter is, that when you find the Pearl of Great Price, your Lord Jesus Christ, you have found the only One who can save you and help you to understand yourself and the meaning of life. Solomon said that there were things which his soul still sought, but that he could not find the lasting value of them even when he was an old man. In finding the Pearl of Great Price, we will, all of our lives, be learning of how very great and precious Christ is to our souls.

4th – Having Found the Pearl of Great Price, he sells all to Buy It.

Philippians 3: 7-114 – “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.” “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

You can see here that even though Paul had known the Lord for many years that he still had to consider all things that were gain to him personally as loss for the sake of knowing the greatness and glory of Christ better. He suffered the loss of all the personal advantages of being considered great as a Jew, great as one who had been zealous for the law, and all the confidences that he had in his flesh; being circumcised on the eighth day of the stock of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, being a Pharisee, thinking of himself as blameless as regards that which was in the law. All of these things he had to count as loss in order to be able to gain or win Christ. What this means is that in living our Christian life, we always have more to learn about the great value of knowing Christ and learning from Him and walking with Him, the One who is the King of Glory, the One who is bringing us to eternal glory. We have much to learn in order to be conformed to His blessed image. We have much to learn about the infinite value of the Pearl of Great Price.

We see here also many phrases in these verses which should make us think about Christ as being the Pearl of Great Price, which the Merchant Man wanted more than anything else. The excellence of the knowledge of Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith in Christ, the power of Christ's resurrection, and even the fellowship of His sufferings. And, pressing on for the goal of the upward call to be with Christ.

An Interpretive Footnote:

The Question of Whether the Church is the Pearl, or the gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ are the Pearl of Great Price.

There are some Christians who believe that the Church is the Pearl of Great Price. In their view Christ seeks for those whom He will save in both the individual and collective sense, and that this is the reason that He went to the cross and died for the Church. He sold all for her, because of His great love for her. When Christ finds this Pearl He then forms her by His grace into something very beautiful. This true in a very real sense concerning Christ and what He did for us His Church. But I think that there are problems with this interpretation. And so we need to think a little more about the specifics of this parable and not to try to force them into a Pre-millennial dispensational framework, as some have.

The Old Schofield Bible Notes on Matthew 13: 45 & 46 states that the Church is the Pearl.

“The true Church, "one body" formed by the Holy Spirit 1Co_12:12; 1Co_12:13. As Israel is the hid treasure, so the Church is the pearl of great cost. Covering the same period of time as the mysteries of the kingdom, is the mystery of the Church; Rom_16:25; Rom_16:26; Eph_3:3-10; Eph_5:32. Of the true Church a pearl is a perfect symbol:

- (1) A pearl is one, a perfect symbol of unity 1Co_10:17; 1Co_12:12; 1Co_12:13; Eph_4:4-6.
- (2) a pearl is formed by the accretion, and that not mechanically, but vitally, through a living one, as Christ adds to the Church Act_2:41; Act_2:47; Act_5:14; Act_11:24; Eph_2:21; Col_2:19.
- (3) Christ, having given Himself for the pearl, is now preparing it for presentation to Himself Eph_5:25-27. The kingdom is not the Church, but the true children of the kingdom during the fulfilment of these mysteries, baptized by one Spirit into one body 1Co_12:12; 1Co_12:13 compose the true Church, the pearl.”

John Gill on this Parable of the Pearl – “This parable may be understood of Christ's seeking, finding, and purchasing his elect: for, certain it is, that he has sought after them; which implies, that they were lost and going astray; expresses his great love to them, value for them, and desire after them; in doing which, he took much pains, and used much diligence: and certain it also is, that he finds them in redemption, and in effectual calling; and that they are to him a pearl of great price; as very precious to God, so highly esteemed of by Christ, as his portion, his inheritance, and his jewels. He has also parted with all he had for the sake of these persons; he became poor, emptied himself of everything, even gave himself a ransom for them, and so made a purchase of them, with the price of his own blood: **Though to this sense it may be objected**, that it does not seem so agreeable, that Christ should be compared to a merchant man, which better suits with those that deal with him, than as he is concerned with them; nor does he seek after any other than his elect: whereas this merchant man is said to be seeking goodly pearls; any pearls that were so: nor is Christ's finding his elect a chance business; nor have they any intrinsic excellency in them, to denominate them pearls, but by his grace. **The more common interpretation of it is**, that it designs a sensible sinner, seeking after the true way of salvation, and finding Christ, and parting with all for him: such a man is a spiritual merchant, who trades in foreign parts, and in things of worth and value; and such an one seeks after a variety of things, which at first sight seem “goodly”, in order to obtain salvation by; as civility, morality, a legal righteousness, fasting, watchings, prayer, a profession of religion, and a submission to external ordinances; but at length finds Christ.”

