

# The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price

Matthew 13:45-46

*Halifax: 23 October 2005*

## **Introduction:**

Today, we come to the sixth parable in Matthew 13:

- The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price.

This parable is very similar to the one that we looked at last week:

- The Parable of the Hidden Treasure.
- In each of these parables, Jesus shows you the value of the kingdom of God.
  - I pointed out to you last week that we are accustomed to judge the value of a thing by its popularity.
    - If you are in a strange town looking for a good place to eat, and you see one restaurant that has a full parking lot,
      - and another that has an empty parking lot,
      - You will naturally assume that the one with the full parking lot is the best!
- In Jesus' day, most people in Israel were expecting the Messiah come...
  - And when He came to establish God's kingdom,
    - they believed that He would be almost universally accepted—especially in Israel!
  - But Jesus' disciples see something very different happening with their Master...
    - The leaders in Israel have not accepted Him, and neither have most of the common people...
    - And the problem doesn't seem to be getting any better—
      - The more He ministers, the more He is rejected!
  - And not only that,
    - but now Jesus has told them these disturbing parables...
      - parables that speak of rejection:
        - There was the parable of the sower that told how many who hear will never bear fruit...
        - And the parable of the tares that showed how there would be many hypocrites in His kingdom right up to the end...

- And the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven that showed how the kingdom would have a very small beginning.
- This was not at all what Jesus' disciples or anybody else were expecting when the Messiah came!
- The question must be asked:
  - Was there something wrong with His kingdom?

With the twin parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price Jesus answers this question with an emphatic "no."

- There is nothing wrong with the kingdom at all...
  - The parable of the hidden treasure shows that the reason so many people reject the kingdom is because they simply do not see its value...
    - As soon as anyone discovers the treasure,
      - he immediately sells all that he has to obtain it.
    - The problem is that people are spiritually blind and cannot see.
      - When God opens their eyes and changes their stubborn heart,
        - they will understand the true value of the kingdom and take it!

The excellence of God's kingdom in the eyes of those who find it is brought out in both of these parables...

- But the parable we are looking at today emphasises **the comparative excellence** of this kingdom...
  - It shows us how this treasure (or pearl) is better than any other treasure!
- It brings out this comparative excellence by showing us a wealthy merchant who is out deliberately looking for beautiful pearls...
  - Most people in those days did not have the means to buy even one pearl, but this man has gone out to buy many... and many beautiful ones at that!
    - But when he finds this one particular pearl—the pearl of great price—he immediately sells everything to obtain that one!
    - It is better than all the others put together and he must have it!
      - All the other pearls he may have obtained, all his other treasures, all his money and his clothing must go to buy that one pearl.
      - It is like nothing he has every seen!
  - You see how the comparative excellence of the kingdom is brought out because this man had so much to compare it to...

- In the parable of the hidden treasure, the man didn't claim to have any other treasure...
  - There was no particular comparison made between this treasure and another treasure.
    - The focus was on finding it when it had been hidden.
- But in today's parable, that focus is on the superiority of the pearl of God's kingdom to all other pearls.
  - Not only is the kingdom of Christ excellent to a man who had nothing...
  - It is also excellent to the one who has everything else—
    - so excellent that everything is regarded as rubbish!

I have three exhortations for you that arise out of this parable.

1. First, make it your business to seek pearls.
2. Second, keep searching until you have found the pearl of great price.
3. Third, once you have found this pearl, make it your own.

Let me present each of these to you now...

## **I. First, make it your business to seek pearls.**

### **A. What is this business of seeking pearls?**

1. Pearls were the most prized of all the gems in the ancient world.
  - They were more prized because they were much more rare and difficult to obtain.
  - a. Jesus uses them here to refer to what is most excellent.
    - The man who was out looking for pearls refers to someone who is in pursuit of the best things.
    - It was not just any pearls that this man sought, but beautiful pearls...
      - The word **beautiful** refers to that which is both attractive and good.
  - b. To be in the business of seeking pearls is to seek what is excellent.
    - To use the words of the Apostle Paul, it is to seek "glory, honour, and immortality."
    - I exhort you to make it your business in life to pursue what is excellent!

2. What are some of the pearls that you are to look for?

- a. There are hundreds of them. Here are twelve...
- There is the pearl of self-improvement when you say,
    - “I want to be a better person.”
  - There is the pearl of success when you say,
    - “I want to achieve great things with my life.”
  - There is the pearl of happiness when you say,
    - “I want to be truly satisfied.”
  - There is the pearl of virtue when you say,
    - “I want to be honest and fair, a person of honour and integrity.”
  - There is the pearl of love when you say,
    - “I want to find true and lasting love in this world, and to share in that love with someone.”
  - There is the pearl of riches, when you say,
    - “I want to have and enjoy the good things of this world.”
  - There is the pearl of power, when you say,
    - “I want to have the power to do what I please, to change things in the world and to change things in my life and family.”
  - There is the pearl of peace, when you say,
    - “I want to live in peace with my surroundings and with everyone around me.”
  - There is the pearl of purpose, when you say,
    - “I want to have meaning and purpose in my life.”
  - There is the pearl of health, when you say,
    - “I want to be free of sickness and disease, of all pain and infirmity.”
  - There is the pearl of education when you say,
    - “I want to know—I want to learn about the world and all that is in it.”
  - There is the pearl of righteousness when you say,
    - “I know that I am not right but I want to be right.”

TRANS> There are twelve—there are many more that could be named!

- b. And I say, you ought to make it your business to seek after these pearls...
    - You ought to seek them because you don't have them...
      - The merchant was not out seeking pearls because he had them, but because he didn't have them and he wanted to have them.
    - You don't have any of these pearls I just mentioned in a real and lasting way...
      - but if you are wise, you will want to have them and you will pursue them.
      - It only makes sense to make it your business to seek what is excellent if you do not have what is excellent.
- B. But there are many who do not seek them.
1. Many do not seek because they do not believe there are any pearls to be found...
    - or at least they believe that the pearls are out of reach.
    - They have given up.
    - a. This is a leading characteristic of our age of Post Modernism.
      - The previous age, Modernism, was a very optimistic age.
        - A couple of generations ago, everyone thought there were pearls and that these pearls could be found...
        - They tried to create the perfect society and to solve all the world's problems...
        - They tried to find true happiness...
      - But they could not find the pearls so they gave up.
        - And so it is today that most people are not seeking much of anything.
        - They are cynical...
          - They say, "What is love? What is excellence? What is happiness?"
          - They are discouraged and they have decided that there is no use in trying.
    - b. Now I am not for a moment suggesting that we go back to modernism...
      - Modernism was not honest.
        - It was not honest because it promised that man could obtain all these pearls without God.
        - That is why it failed and I am glad that it failed!

- I do not want to go back to modernism...
    - But I do urge you to go back to seeking what is excellent!
  - There are pearls to be found.
    - And God has promised that you will find them if you truly seek them.
    - There are many places I could quote from, but here is one:
      - Proverbs 2:3-5: Yes, if you cry out for discernment, *And* lift up your voice for understanding, If you seek her as silver, And search for her as *for* hidden treasures; Then you will understand the fear of the LORD, And find the knowledge of God.
    - Don't allow the prevailing attitude of cynicism to keep you from seeking what is excellent.
2. I don't mean to say that it is impossible to find the pearl of great price if you do not seek for it..
- a. You may find it.
    - The man in the parable we looked at last week was not looking and he found the treasure anyway.
    - God is merciful and He can show you the treasure even when you are not seeking it.
  - b. But there is no promise for you if you do not seek.
    - His promise is that those who seek will find.
      - If you are wise, you will take hold of His promise and start seeking!

TRANS> But this promise is only good for those who are honest about their seeking.

C. What does it mean to be honest about your seeking?

1. You are honest about your seeking when you are honest about your need.
  - a. The Bible tells us that everybody in this wide world knows something...
    - We all know something that we try not to admit..
    - You know, and everybody else knows, that God created us.
      - He put us here for His own purposes.
      - We are here for Him.
        - You don't have to have any special revelation to know this.
        - God has shown this to everyone by the things He has made, even His eternal power and divine nature.
        - You know that you are here for Him.

- b. And there is a second thing you know.
    - You know that even though you are here for God, you have not glorified Him as God or given thanks...
    - You know that you have not lived for Him...
    - You have not fulfilled the purpose for which you were created.
  - c. And so the great need you have is that you are not fulfilling your purpose before God...
    - The great need is that rather than serving God and living in the enjoyment of Him, you are separated from Him—
      - cut off from Him!
      - He is offended with you and His wrath is upon you!
        - Your great need is to be brought back to Him.
2. And so if you are really to find the pearls of self-improvement and success and happiness and virtue and love and riches and power and peace and purpose and health and education and righteousness...
- you will not look for all these pearls outside of the context of God.
- a. You will be honest that you were created for God's glory and you will not live according to lie of autonomy...
    - The lie that you are like God...
    - The lie that you are **not** here for Him,
      - and that whatever gods there may be are only there for you to manipulate.
    - This is the great deception that Satan began in the Garden of Eden.
      - "You will be like God"
      - "You will be the one who ultimately determines what is good and evil."
      - "You are here for yourself."
  - b. If you are seeking for the pearls in that context of autonomy...
    - then God is set against you and you are sure to fail in the end.
    - If you are seeking these pearls in a make-believe world that excludes the true God of the Bible (the One who holds it all together)—
      - then you are not an honest seeker and you might as well give up!

- You may be honest that you are seeking after these things—
    - It may be true enough that you are looking for them...
    - But you are not looking for them in an honest way.
      - You are like a city counsellor who comes asking the king for money for his city,
        - but who is going to use the money to finance a rebellion!
        - He is looking for money all right, but not with an honest purpose.
  - If you are looking for self-improvement and success and happiness and virtue and love and riches and power and peace and purpose and health and education and righteousness for any purpose besides the glorification of God,
    - you are not really seeking pearls at all...
    - You are not seeking what is excellent but what is evil.
3. There is only one way that you can become an honest seeker...
- a. And that is when God's Spirit works in your heart to show you that your great need is to have all these pearls for God...
    - Not just to have the pearls...
      - But to have them for service to Him and the glorification and enjoyment of Him.
  - b. When the Spirit does that,
    - You are brought very low.
      - You begin to realise what you are in God's sight and what you need!
      - You become poor in Spirit and you start hungering and thirsting for righteousness.
        - That is how you become an honest seeker.
        - And God says,
          - Jer 29:13: And you will seek Me and find *Me*, when you search for Me with all your heart.
          - That's why I love to see people seeking for true pearls from God—
            - I know that something good is going to happen.

TRANS> And so my first exhortation is for you to go into the business of seeking pearls.



## **II. Second, keep up your search until you have found the pearl of great price.**

### **A. Too many seekers stop short!**

- Too many seekers are too easily satisfied.
- 1. There are those who become satisfied with that which is very superficial...
  - a. They find a way to attain wealth and they feel good about themselves...
    - They are satisfied with their wealth and they think that is all there is to seek and so they stop seeking...
    - They say, "I have everything I want."
  - b. Of they find a relationship with someone special and they say, "I have found the love that I always sought!"
    - And they seek no further.
    - "I have found my pearl!"
- 2. And there are others that will go along in their search a little farther...
  - They will go along until they find some legal religion...
    - but then they will stop there.
  - a. I am talking about any of the religions that cause you up to think you can do things for God without the righteousness of Christ...
    - It might be Roman Catholicism with its works righteousness...
      - or it might be a church that teaches you that you are righteous because you try to be good person and help others...
    - There are plenty such religions around...
  - b. And it is true that in this kind of religion, you might make a certain amount of progress...
    - You might become a better person to live with and you might be more faithful about saying your prayers...
- 3. But if God's Spirit has truly worked in your heart to show your need,
  - You will not be satisfied with these pearls.
  - You will realise that you still come far short of the glory of God.
    - You will be like Pilgrim in Pilgrim's Progress.
    - He went to the hill of difficulty where legalism was and he still had that burden on his back because he understood his true need.
      - He could not be satisfied with superficial solutions.

- B. This is where the true religion stands apart from all the others.
1. I have often spoken to people of this world who believe that all religions are basically the same.
    - They point out that the moral codes are similar and that in the best expressions of them, love is the goal...
      - That is not really a true statement except in the North American versions of these other religions,
        - The North American versions of Hinduism and Buddhism and Mohammadism all talk about love,
          - but this is only what they have borrowed from Christianity to gain acceptability in North America.
      - But lets take these religions as they are presented here...
        - What is it that makes the true religion stand out from these and from all perversions of Christianity?
  2. I believe the main difference is that the true religion is the only one that deals with man's true problem that I spoke about before.
    - a. The others all have superficial ways of dealing with our sin.
      - They all present things that we can do or that other people can do for us that will make us right with God.
      - They deal superficially with our need to be forgiven, and so their solutions are superficial.
    - b. The true religion teaches you that there is nothing you can do to make yourself right with God.
      - It teaches that righteousness does not result from what you do, but from what Christ has done for you.
      - It teaches that in order to make you righteous,
        - the Son of God had to come down from heaven and die for you sins!
    - c. All the other religions either:
      - pretend that we don't need to be made right with God...
        - or pretend that there is something we ourselves can do to become right with God.
      - They offer only a superficial solution...
        - And if you are satisfied with these religions, you have stopped seeking too soon.

TRANS> If God's Spirit has stirred up the seeking, you will not be satisfied with these religions.

C. You will keep seeking until you find this pearl of Jesus Christ!

- You will search for Him with all your heart and when you find Him, you will know that you have found everything!

1. The Lord Jesus teaches that no one is good except God.

a. But how are we to find God—that God that we all know about who made us?

- He is to be found through Jesus Christ!
  - Jesus is the Light of the world.
  - He came down from heaven to show us the Father and to reconcile us with Him.
- You cannot access God or come to God apart from Jesus Christ,
  - nor can you know God.

b. It is in Christ that all the other pearls are found:

1) It is in Christ that true self-improvement is found—

- it is by His grace that we are changed from what we are to what we should be...
- He is the one who gives us the Holy Spirit to sanctify us and make us new creations for God.

2) It is in Christ that true success is found—

- it is by His work that we are able to carry out God's calling in this world in a way that pleases God—to do His work.

3) It is in Christ that true happiness is found—

- It is through Him that we are brought back into the favour of God.
- It is God alone who knows how to bless us and make us entirely happy forever.

4) It is in Christ that true virtue is found—

- He is the one who transforms us to live as the image of God in this world, in all honesty and sincerity.

5) It is in Christ that true riches are found—

- for He is the possessor of all things in heaven and on earth, and He has inherited all these for Himself and His people who trust in Him.
  - We will be delighting in His gifts for all eternity from His inexhaustible treasury.
  - We are not Gnostics! We are talking about things like food and houses!
- 6) It is in Christ that true power is found—
- for it is through Him that we are able to move mountains.
  - It is by His grace that we overcome all our foes, even death itself.
  - It is by His grace that we are able to overcome our addictions.
- 7) It is in Christ that true peace is found—
- He is the one that reconciles us with God through His death, and when we are reconciled with God, we have peace with God.
- 8) It is in Christ that we find our true purpose—
- For He came here to please the Father and when He saves us, we die with Him and are made alive again to serve God.
- 9) It is in Christ that we have true health—
- He is the resurrection and the life, the first fruits of the resurrection...
  - He was raised with a glorified body that knows no pain and no corruption, no sickness and no infirmity...
    - That is what he bestows on all those who belong to Him.
    - He will heal all our diseases.
- 10) It is in Christ that we have true education...
- For if we know Him, we know the Father whom He reveals to us...
  - And He gives us counsel and wisdom and leads us into the eternal discovery of God and His world.
    - We know that the moon and the stars, the rivers and the trees, were spoken into existence by Him.
- 11) It is in Christ that we have true righteousness...
- We are not right with God on our own, but He is made righteousness to us...
    - As our king and head, He fulfils all the demands of God's holy law, not only for Himself, but also for we who have sinned against God.

2. The world may seem to have some of these pearls, but they only have them in a superficial way apart from Christ...
  - a. A man may suppose himself to have good health, and he may in a measure, but it is not a lasting thing—
    - No matter how good his health may today, he is a dying man...
    - Without Christ, the pearl of good health that he may have laboured hard to find will fade and that man will die.
  - b. Another may seem to have a certain amount of virtue,
    - But when that virtue is examined on the day of judgement, it will be exposed as worthless.
      - It will be exposed as being full of worms and bugs.
  - c. Another may seem to have happiness,
    - But it is a happiness that does not go very deep and that will not last very long.
      - Without Christ, it will evaporate because it is not a happiness rooted in service to God.
3. Christ is the pearl of great price and until you have found Him, you really don't have anything at all.
  - He is the One that brings us all these other pearls in communion with God.
  - a. Without Him, we may have a semblance of these things,
    - but they are held in rebellious opposition to God.
    - Everything in this world that is not for the glory of God—even if it is morality or kindness—is in the end antagonistic to God...
      - It may look fine on the outside, but it denies the One to whom all glory and honour is due!
      - It is like taking a lovely painting and pretending that you painted it yourself!
  - b. We are fallen creatures and we must be radically saved by the Son of God before we can please God...
    - We cannot do anything good before God until we have been cleansed by Christ and have had our minds renewed by His Spirit.
      - None of our works are done properly—for God's glory—until we are born of God's Spirit...

- And even then, every one of them needs cleansing by the blood of Christ because they are yet imperfect.
- God is a holy God, and it is by Christ alone that we live before Him.
- Do not stop seeking for pearls until you have found Jesus Christ.

### **III. Third, once you have found this pearl, make it your own.**

A. Forsake all the other pearls like the merchant did so that you can have this one pearl of great price.

1. The merchant knew that he had found a pearl that was worth more than all the others put together, so he gave up all that he had that he might have this pearl.

- Some of those pearls may have been quite costly...
  - but they were nothing compared to this one pearl of great price.

2. And I say that all your pearls apart from Christ must be cast away when you find Him...no matter how valuable they may be.

a. For example, you may have great riches...

1) What do you do when you come to Christ?

- You possess these riches now for Him—for God’s glory.
- They are no longer yours, but they belong to God.
  - You give thanks to Him for them and use them in ways that honour Him.

2) Like Zacchaeus, you first restore what you have taken wrongfully...

- And then you begin to live differently toward riches...
- You give generously to those who are in need.
  - You become to others an agent of blessing instead of cursing.

b. You may have a wife...

- That is a good thing. The Bible says that a wife is good thing...
- But when you come to Christ everything changes...
  - Now your marriage is for the glory of God...
    - You change the way you speak to her...the harshness and the bitterness must go.
    - You change the way you deal with her and you start leading her in the worship of God...
    - And you give thanks for her to God, and live with all contentment—not looking upon other women with covetous desire.

3. This is what it means to forsake everything for Christ...
  - It means that nothing about you stands independently of Him.
    - It is all brought into His service and you have nothing that is your own in the autonomous since—you now possess everything for God.
    - Even your health is given to Him so that if you are sick,
      - you will look to that sickness as something He has given you to serve Him in this world for a time—until the resurrection when he takes all your infirmity away.

B. There are many examples of those who left all for the kingdom of God.

1. In Hebrews 11:26, we are shown how Moses forsook the world:
  - Heb 11:24-26: By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.
    - a. Moses had the best of Egypt, for he was the adopted of son of Pharaoh's daughter,
      - but for him to serve in Pharaoh's court would be to forsake Christ.
      - Serving Christ for him meant going into the wilderness for forty years with a rebellious people—
        - but he preferred to serve Christ in the wilderness than to serve the Devil in a palace.
        - He preferred that because he realised that Christ was the pearl of great price and that possessing Him was far better than possessing the whole world.
    - b. What about you?
      - 1) You say, God has not called me to go into the wilderness to lead rebellious people—what does this have to do with me?
        - I will tell you what it has to do with you...
        - That next thing that you just have to have even though you can't afford it—even though having it will keep you from obeying God...
          - from tithing or from carrying for an ageing parent in need or from buying some Christian books that you ought to be reading...
            - It means, forget it!
            - If possessing it will keep you from serving Christ, give it up!
              - That thing is not your pearl, Christ is...

- 2) Or perhaps it means to get a handle on that worrying that you have been doing...
  - Perhaps you are paralysed with worry because you are afraid you won't have enough.
  - The servant of God does not worry, but he works...
    - He does what he can to provide, and he trusts in God to provide, and gives thanks to God for either poverty or riches...
    - Moses would never have gone into the wilderness if he had had an accountant!
      - How are you going to feed all these people?
      - Your treasure is not in this world, it is Christ.

TRANS> Moses is a great example for us of one who forsook the world for Christ.

2. Now I want you to consider Paul.
  - a. He had his own treasure...
    - All His life, he had laboured to be righteous according to the law.
    - And, as far as his outward behaviour, he was!
    - He was very proud of what he had done.
    - He had a very high reputation among all who knew him.
    - He had what to him was a precious pearl.
    - In Phil 3:4-5 he tells us about what he had...
      - Phil 3:4-6: If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.
  - b. But what happened when he met Christ—the pearl of great price?
    - He changed his whole attitude toward that autonomous righteousness he had manufactured.
      - He realized that it was full of holes!
    - Listen to what he says in Phil 3:7-10
      - Phil 3:7-10: 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,

- That pearl that he had spent so much time acquiring was like pile of dung to him!
- Paul renounced it all that he might have the righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus Christ...
  - A righteousness that is the gift of God.
- c. How does this apply to you?
  - It means that when you meet Christ, you must give up all confidence in what you have done and in what you are doing now...
    - God is not pleased with you because of your own work, but because of Christ's work in your behalf.
    - You don't really know God at all if you think He can accept your righteousness...
      - "Oh, but I am a nice person and I try to do good to other people."
      - "Oh, but I always say my prayers."
    - I am glad you do, but all of those things are full of termites...
      - They are saturated with insincere motives and impurities...
      - They must be laundered by Christ or they can never be accepted by the Father.
        - It is not your righteousness that commends you to God but His!
        - Give up all your righteousness and trust in Him.

TRANS> So you see what it means to forsake all that you may have Christ.

### **Conclusion**

This is a very excellent parable for us to see what we have in Jesus Christ that we might delight in Him alone!

- Jesus is showing you in this parable that the kingdom of God is more excellent than anything else that might be compared to it!
  - There may be pearls, but this is the pearl of great price!

Matthew has already shown us that Jesus thinks this way.

- Back in Matthew 4 Satan offered Him all the kingdoms of the world with all their glory,
  - Jesus might have had them independently of the Father.
  - But Jesus preferred service to the Father even though that service involved going to the cross.
  
- Providing righteousness for us that we might possess God's kingdom was more important to Him than all the kingdoms of the world...
  - even though purchasing that kingdom for us meant that He must suffer in ways that we will never understand the depths of!
  
  - If God's kingdom, purchased for us, meant that much to Him,
    - What a fool you are if you do not forsake all that you have to come into this kingdom now that He has made the way for you through His suffering!
      - Come, take this pearl.
      - Away with everything else!
      - It is yours through faith.