

## The Gem Parables

Matt. 13:44-46

The four parables of the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price could be called the opposite parables since they each have been interpreted in completely opposite ways. Just as the Mustard Seed and Leaven are a pair which combine to make a single point, the same is true of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price. The Mustard Seed and the Leaven are either good news parables that describe the growth and influence of the church or else they are bad news parables that warn the church against the perils of self-importance and corruption. Similarly, the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price are either about the value of the kingdom and the appropriate response to this opportunity or they are about the passion that God has for His church and the sacrifice by which He has made it His own. The parables must be interpreted together whichever way you go. Both interpretive views have value and seem to speak the truth in ways that are needed.

The classic view of the Hidden Treasure sees the man who finds the treasure as the person who hears the gospel and who then recognizes its need and value. This is a like the experience of the disciples who went to the desert in search of the Messiah. They thought that John might be the one but when they met Jesus they found Him. Consequently, they let go of their attachment to John and followed Jesus. Jesus was the one they had been looking for and they were so full of excitement and anticipation that they didn't want to miss the moment in history that their people had dreamed of for thousands of years. They left their businesses, their homes, and everything that had been their life up to that point in order to be Jesus' disciples. They did not think of themselves as having lost their lives but as those who had gained eternal life and in truth, even in this life, their losses were turned into gain and blessing. This is the attitude and experience of those who "get" the gospel. There is nothing that is more important or valuable than living in right relationship with Christ. Such a life is its

own reward and any "sacrifice" is not really that, it is merely the joyful investment of the devoted disciple.

The Pearl of Great Price is a kind of retelling of the Hidden Treasure. The differences are the emphasis on the purposeful search in the case of the Pearl of Great Price and the emphasis on hiding the Treasure until the field could be purchased in the case of the Hidden Treasure. In each case, the discoverer of the treasure sells all he has in order to attain it. The possessing of the treasure is the object and this is seen as the experience of what God intends the Christian life to be. Discovery is the first step but then possession is the real objective. What good is it to know about the treasure or the pearl and not have it?

But the other way to interpret these parables, the minority view if you will, sees them as an expression of how God has "paid the price" of our salvation. The classic interpretation does nothing with the treasure being found and then hidden again until the field can be purchased and the treasure thus secured by the discoverer. This is a natural part of the story and should have some relevance to the interpretation. But if the active participant represents God or Christ as in the sower parables then Christ sees the church in the field or the world as the object of His activity but He hides His intention until the field has been purchased and the treasure is His. This was accomplished on the cross. Valuing the church as His Hidden treasure He rejoices in making the necessary sacrifice to make the treasure His own.

In the Case of the Pearl of Great Price, the merchant is searching for pearls and finds the ultimate, the pearl that he had always been looking for and so he sells all in order to buy it. Jesus told this story knowing perfectly well the truth about pearls. The beauty of a pearls originated with an injury to the oyster that is then coated over by the oyster as a means of healing its wound. The pearl is only possible after such an injury. So the pearl reminds us of sin and the remedy for sin - which is the covering of our sin by the blood of Christ. Jesus' mission in coming was to first, offer Himself as the Lamb of God who died for our sins and then to call us to the new life He gives to those who believe and who trust in Him. We who

believe are redeemed from sin and transformed into the body of Christ,

We become the beautiful bride of Christ when we were before full of sin and without hope in the world.

The value of this view of the parables is reflective. We are brought into an encounter with the purposeful and determined love of God for us and to encounter that love is to be challenged by it. God's love for you calls you to respond and to return His love and to know what it is to live in relationship with Him. God's love for you speaks to your value and significance. We live in circumstances that often work to diminish our sense of value and worthiness of love and respect. God's love speaks truth to these lies. You are important. What you do matters. Who you are matters. God's gift to you is your opportunity to find the fulfillment that you long for. Begin your day by remembering God's love for you. Open your eyes and see the testimony of His love. Wake up to the reality of a God who created you and who knows you and who loves you. He breathes His goodwill into the air around you and that is what sustains you. Every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from above...