

ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH

NEW YORK CITY

THE TREASURE, THE PEARL, THE NET

Matthew 13:44-52

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, July 27, 2008

The parables of today's Gospel reading describe the kind of people who have already been made alive in Christ. To use the imagery of the first two parables, they are the ones in whom the seed of the gospel has already been planted and is beginning to bear fruit. **In the first**, a man finds a treasure in a field. "*When [he] found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.*" **In the second**, Jesus describes a merchant looking for pearls. "*When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.*"

The point of these parables lies in the nature and the resulting action of those who discover the treasure, which in the gospel. In these matters the man who discovered the treasure and the merchant who found the pearl are identical. They make every effort to possess what they discovered. There is a contrast that should not be overlooked, however. The man who found the hidden treasure was apparently not looking for it, his discovery was what we would call an accident, but in the case of the merchant, the finding of the pearl was the result of a long and faithful quest.

That contrast aptly describes the past experiences of people who find salvation. Some were not particularly anxious to find Christ; in fact, they were not very interested in religion. They were going on their way when suddenly an unexpected thing confronted them: **the Gospel**. They had never really heard it before. They were not seeking it. But there it was, and at once, with that insight granted by God's internal work of regeneration, they saw that this was a prize of far greater value than anything that had ever come into their lives previously. They saw themselves as sinners in need of a Savior. They saw Jesus as that Savior. They recognized that if they had Him, they had all else besides. Their case illustrates Isaiah's words: "*I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me.*" (Isaiah 65:1). Just think, all those years you were seeking that God was seeking you as well. At times nearly despaired, but then suddenly the pearl of great price was before you, and you laid everything else aside to secure that most valued object. My brothers and sisters, these

are the people of whom Jesus spoke when he said, “*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.*” (Matthew 7:7).

I. PURSUING THE PRIZE: Here is where the main lessons of the two parables are to be found, for although the early experiences of these two men were different, once they had come upon the treasure, which is the gospel, they acted in similar ways. What did they do? **First**, they recognized the value of what they had found. **Second**, they determined to have it. **Third**, they sold everything to make their purchase. **Fourth**, they acquired the treasure.

A. The two men recognized the value of what they had found. It is not surprising that the merchant recognized the value of the special pearl, for he had been seeking pearls and had presumably learned their value (or lack of value) through his seeking. Nor is it surprising that the man who discovered the hidden treasure saw its value. He was not seeking it, but we can hardly imagine him casually kicking at the treasure with his foot and walking on. A treasure is valuable. **(1.)** We are inclined to say that a person who discovers treasure anywhere or in any form and then walks away from it is a fool. But many do that with the gospel. The gospel is preached; it is the answer to our entire individual and community needs, for this life and for eternity. But despite that fact, millions simply walk away and continue in their spiritual poverty. **(2.)** Do you want to know the character of one that has been made alive by God? That person will say with David, “*I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.*” *Psalm 84:10*). And he cries out, “*Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*” (*Philippians 3:13-14*). Such a person has already had a change of values. He has recognized the poverty of all that comes from man and has seen the true splendor of the gospel.

B. They determined to have it. The second thing that characterized both the man who found the treasure and the merchant who discovered the pearl was their determination to have what they found. The stories do not spell it out, but imagine this contrast. He would have to adjust his priorities and change his lifestyle. These men determined to acquire the treasure or the pearl for themselves.

- C. They sold everything to make their purchase.** What did it take for each of them to possess these treasures? It required giving up other things. Having recognized that value of their discovery and having determined to have it, they sold all they had to make the purchase. Nothing in the stories should be construed as teaching that salvation can be bought, except in the sense of Isaiah 55:1, *“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.”* But if that is the case, what is the point of the man and the merchant selling their goods? It is a picture of renouncing everything that might be a hindrance to attaining the prize. Martin Luther had it right when he wrote, “Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also.” Luther did not think for a moment that salvation could be purchased by works or the renunciation of valued people or possession, but he was determined that nothing, not even life itself, should keep him from God’s Kingdom.
- D. They acquired the treasure.** Having recognized the value of their discovery and having sold everything in their desire to have it, the man who discovered the treasure and he merchant who discovered the pearl then made their purchase. They acquired that on which their desires had been set. This speaks of individual appropriation. It tells us that salvation does not consist merely in seeing the value of Christ’s work and wanting it for oneself. Christ must actually become ours by faith, which is the means of appropriation. **Faith has three elements.** There is an intellectual element, in which we recognize the truths of the gospel. There is an emotional or heart element, in which we find ourselves being drawn to what we recognize. There is also a volitional element, in which we actually make a commitment to him whom the gospel presents. Salvation is a personal matter. People are saved one by one as by the grace of God, as they see their need and come to Jesus, trusting that he is the Son of God. Each one of us come and accepts the treasure for ourselves. You are not called to poverty in Christ but to the greatest spiritual wealth. You are not called to disappointment but to fulfillment. You are not too called to sorrow but to joy. How could it be otherwise when the treasure is the only Son of God? How can the outcome be bad when it means salvation?

II. THE PARABLE OF THE NET: The last parable in Matthew 13 introduces a new life situation. Fishing and fishermen, but it makes almost the same points as the parable of the wheat and tares growing up together until the harvest, when there is a gathering of both followed by a separation. In the last of these parables, a gathering of fish is followed by a separation of the good from the bad. In both parables we have the work of the angels who do the gathering and separating. We even have a repetition of key phrases; “the end of the age.” And “throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”