

Treasure of Heaven

By Vicar Jake Zabel

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Sermon text Matthew 13:44-50

44 “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and, because he was glad, he went and sold everything that he had, and bought that field.

45 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dealer looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found one very expensive pearl, he went away and sold everything that he had, and bought it.

47 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was thrown into the sea and gathered all kinds of fish. 48 When it was full, they pulled it up onto the shore, sat down, and collected the good ones into containers, but they threw the bad ones away. 49 It will be like that at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate wicked people from righteous people 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace. There they will weep and grind their teeth.

51 Have you understood all these things?” - They answered, “Yes.”

52 He told them, “Therefore, every scribe who has been instructed for the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings new and old things out of his treasure.”

Lord sanctify us by your truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

In today's reading we hear from Jesus three parables concerning what the Kingdom of Heaven is like, the treasure in a field, the pearl of great price and the dragnet cast into the sea. The repeated phrase “again” shows that all three are closely connected. The phrase again used in v44 for the treasure show that these three parables are also closely connected to the three parables about the Kingdom of Heaven mentioned earlier in Matthew 13, the parable of the weeds in the field, the mustard seed and the leaven. In fact, the parable of the weeds and the parable of the dragnet are very similar stories, with very similar meanings. These two parables act as bookends combining all six of these parables on the Kingdom of Heaven together.

In today's reading we hear two parables about a man selling all that he has to obtain a treasure and a pearl of great price, and a third parable concerning a net that dragged in both good and bad fish. At face value it is somewhat difficult to determine how exactly these three parables are connected. But as I mentioned above, these six parables on the Kingdom of Heaven are very closely connected.

To properly understand the connection between these parables we need to first determine what these parables are teaching.

The first two parables deal with a man who goes and sells everything he has in order to obtain a great treasure. At first reading the meaning of the parable seems clear to us. Obviously, I, the reader, am that man, and the treasure is salvation. Therefore, the text must be meaning that I need to go and sell everything in order to obtain this treasure; surely I must need to give up everything to obtain these Heavenly riches.

This meaning makes sense, Jesus tells us to store up riches in Heaven (Matt. 6:19-21), that we can't serve both God and money (Matt. 6:24), that we must be willing to hate our own family for Christ's sake (Luke 14:26), that we are to seek first the Kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33, Luke 12:31), and that we are to take up our cross and follow Him (Matt. 16:24, Luke 9:23). Why wouldn't Jesus be telling us now to go and give up everything we have in order to obtain the Kingdom of Heaven?

Many scholars have interpreted the parables this way. They teach that you are the man in the parable and that the treasure is the treasure of Heaven, which is salvation. They teach that you must give up everything for the Kingdom of God. You must give up all you have to obtain these Heavenly riches.

The problem is who among us can obtain such a feat? It is true that as Christians we are expected to put God first, that we are not to worry about the things of this world, and that we are to be prepared to give up everything for Christ's sake. Yes, these demands are placed on us. Yet who among us has achieved this perfectly. Who among us has given up everything for the Kingdom of God? No one. None of us have fulfilled these demands. For these are the demands of the Law and none of us have managed to keep the Law perfectly. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). None is righteous, no, not one (Rom. 3:10). Under the Law all the world stands guilty before God (Rom. 3:19).

For no one can keep God's Law perfectly. No one is able to give up everything for the Kingdom of Heaven. In Matthew 19:16-22 and Luke 18:18-23, we hear of an account between Jesus and a rich young ruler. In this account we hear how the rich young ruler has kept the Law of God, he hasn't killed, cheated, stolen or lied, he honoured his parents, he was a model citizen. Yet Jesus says to him, "you lack one thing, go and sell all that you have and then come and follow me." And the rich young ruler goes away sad, because he was very wealthy and he loved his riches. He was unable to give up everything and thus was unable to meet the full demands of the Law.

Many of us have probably sacrificed a lot for the Kingdom of Heaven. We've given up our time, our money, our friends and our family. Yet none of us have given up everything. God's Law demands that we sacrifice our worldly things for the things of Heaven. God's Law demands that we give up everything and put God first. Yet the demands of the Law are absolute. James 2:10 states that if you keep the whole Law, but break it in one spot, then you are guilty of breaking the whole Law. Close enough is not good enough when it comes to God's Law.

God's Law does not demand that you give up some things or even most things. No, the Law demands that you give up everything. The man in the parables sold everything to buy the treasure and the pearl.

In order to obtain Heavenly riches the Law must be fulfilled, everything must be given up.

Therefore, the man in the parable is not you. For no one has given up everything for the Kingdom of Heaven.

There is only one person who has given up everything. In Philippians 2:6-8 Paul tells us how Christ, who was equal to God the Father humbled Himself, took on flesh and became a lowly man. Jesus gave up His Heavenly throne and humbled Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross, which is one of the most painful and shameful ways of execution. In 2 Corinthians 8:9 Paul tells us that Christ gave up His Heavenly riches and became poor. And in Ephesians 5:2 Paul says yet again that Christ gave Himself up as a sacrifice to God. Jesus gave up everything. He who is the Creator of the universe, the provider of all, the Lord and King of everything, gave it all up. He became human, He became poor, He became weak, and He died upon the cross. Jesus was forsaken by God, God turned His back on Jesus. The entire wrath of God was poured out upon Jesus, who died and descended into Hell. He who had everything, gave up everything. Jesus is the man in the parable, who sold everything in order to obtain the treasure.

Why would He do this? Why would He give it all up? What treasure did He gain in return for His sufferings?

The answer is you.

For, as Paul said in 2 Corinthians, Christ became poor so that you could become rich, and in Ephesians, Christ gave Himself up because He loved us. Because God so loved the world He sent His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Christ is the man who sold everything for the treasure, who sold everything for the pearl of great price. And you are that treasure, you are that pearl.

This is seen clearly when we connect these two parables with the other four parables on the Kingdom of Heaven. For in none of these other four parables are we ever depicted as the man. We are never associated with the man that does, instead we are always associated with the object. We never do anything, instead Christ does things to us and for us.

In the parable of the weeds, Jesus says the man in the parable is the Son of Man, that is Jesus Himself, while we were the seeds that were sown. In the parable of the mustard seed, Christ is the man that sows, we are the mustard seed that is sown. In the parable of the leaven, Jesus is the woman, and we are the leaven. In the parable of the dragnet, Christ is the fisherman and we are the fish. Therefore, in the parables of the treasure and the pearl, Christ is the man and we are the treasure.

The parables are not about what you must do to get the treasure of Christ; instead they are about what Christ did in order to get you, His treasure. Christ gave up everything for you.

The Law demands perfection and because no human can keep the Law, God kept it on our behalf. Because we cannot give up everything for God, God gave up everything for us. Because we cannot fulfil the demands of the Law, Jesus fulfilled the Law on our behalf. For our sake God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus took our sin and the punishment that we deserved upon Himself and died in our place. Because we cannot give up everything, Jesus gave up everything on our behalf. Jesus was delivered over for our transgressions, and He rose again for our justification (Rom. 4:25), therefore, whoever believes in Him shall not die but have eternal life.

We do nothing for our salvation, instead Christ does it all. For by grace you have been saved through faith, not of yourselves but as the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

God's grace is like the dragnet cast into the sea that gathers all kinds of fish. God's grace is cast over all people. For Jesus died for the entire world. This is what is called Objective Justification.

We do nothing for our salvation, Jesus does it. The fish do not swim onto the shore, they do not choose to be there; instead the net drags them to shore. So too, we do not earn our salvation, we do not work our way to Heaven, instead we are dragged to Heaven by the grace of God.

Just as the treasure and pearl do not decide to be bought so too we Christians do not simply decide to be saved. In John 6:44 Jesus says, "no one comes to me, unless the Father draws them." Without Christ we are slaves to sin, we are dead in our trespasses, we are haters of God, God's enemies. We cannot by our own reason, will or strength come to God. But only by the power of the Holy Spirit who enlivens and enlightens faith within us. And it is this faith that justifies us.

For, the grace of God is offered to all people but only those who receive it in faith will be saved. As Jesus said in John 3:18, "he who believes in Christ is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already, for he had not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God", and again in Mark 16:16, "he who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned." This is what we call Subjective Justification. God's net of grace is cast over the whole world. Jesus died for all. His grace is offered to all people. But only those who believe shall receive this gift of God. For all who do not believe have rejected God's grace, they have rejected God's free gift and have rejected salvation.

Thus just as the fishermen collected good fish and threw away the bad, so will it be at the end of the age, the angels will come and separate the righteous from the unrighteous, the believers from the unbelievers. The believers

shall enter into eternal life with God in Heaven, while the unbelievers shall be cast into the fiery furnace of Hell, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For, such is the fate of those who do not believe in the only begotten Son of God.

But for the one who confesses with his mouth the Lord Jesus and believes in his heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom. 10:9). Because Christ has died for you, He has called you to be His own, He has dragged you to Himself like a fish in a net. Jesus has given up everything for you. You have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20, 7:23). Christ has paid the debt you owed and nailed it to the cross (Col. 2:14).

Christ has given up everything, for you. You are His treasure and having found you, He has gone out with joy over you and given everything He had to buy you. You are a holy people that belong to the Lord God. The Lord had chosen you out of all the people on the face of the earth to be His treasured possession (Deut. 7:6). You are the treasure in the field; you are the pearl of great price. You are God's precious treasured possession. He has given up everything for you. Now He holds you in His hands, with great joy over you. He has made you His treasure, and onto you He has opened the treasures of Heaven.

Jesus gave up everything on your behalf so that you could obtain the treasure of Heaven. All the Heavenly riches have been given to you. Amen.

May our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, continue to bless you richly. Amen.

3rd Hymn: 173,

Prayers for Sunday the 30th of Jul 2017

P Almighty Lord Heavenly Father, King of Heaven and Earth, we thank you for the many blessings of body and soul which you have given us. We thank you that you have given up everything for our sake. We thank You that You gave Your only begotten Son to die for us, so that we may not perish but have eternal life.

Lord in your mercy:**C Hear our prayer.**

P Lord, we thank You that You have called us to Yourself by the power of Your Holy Spirit. We ask that You will continue to enliven faith within us and that You will continue to drag us into Your present.

Lord, we confess that we struggle in our faith and that at times we turn from You. We ask that You will continue to draw us back to You and that we will strengthen us with Your Spirit that we may turn back to Your grace through faith.

Lord in your mercy:**C Hear our prayer.**

P Lord, we thank You, that we can gather here today in Your presence to hear Your Word preached and taught to us. We ask for your continued protection so that we may continue to gather in peace and safety. We pray for all those Christians around the world, those suffering under the tyranny of Islam and Communism, who cannot come together without fear of death and punishment. We ask you Lord to bring low all the opponents to Your Word and we ask that you may grant safety and peace to those who gather around Your Word.

Lord in your mercy:**C Hear our prayer.**

P Lord, we thank you for the gift of leaders and teachers in Your Church. We ask You to send out labourers into Your harvest, raise up good, faithful and courageous men who will answer the call of the Ministry. We ask that You will grant Your Church with Scriptural teachers who will proclaim Your Word in truth and purity.

Lord we ask that Your Word will be taught truthfully in the homes of this nation. Raise up fathers and mother who will bring up their children in Your Word and will faithfully bring them to Your Church.

Lord in your mercy:**C Hear our prayer.**

P Lord, we pray for the leaders of this nation. We pray for the local mayor, Graham Lehmann, the state premier Anastacia Palaszczuk, the national Prime Minister Malcom Turnbull, and the head of the Commonwealth Queen Elizabeth II. Bless our nation and all the people who dwell therein. Help all those in government and positions of powers to maintain justice, peace, honesty, integrity and courage. Help our leaders to be guided by the truth of Your Word, we pray that all members of government may be lead by Your Scriptures and guided by Your Truth.

Lord in your mercy:**C Hear our prayer.**

P Lord, we thank you for all the worldly gifts that You have given to us, we thank you for our food, our clothes and our shelter and for all those that have provided us with Your gifts. We pray for the farmers of this nation and all who You use to provide our daily bread. We pray for rain and good weather and that Your blessing may be upon the farmers and workers of this nation.

Lord in your mercy:**C Hear our prayer.**

P Lord, we pray for all those who are sick and injured at this time, we ask that Your healing hands will be upon them. We pray particularly for Pastor Ohlson's grandson Cory as he recovers at this time, we pray for *(if there are any other members of the Parish you can think of including)*, and for all those who are in need of Your healing that this present time. Lord in your mercy:**C Hear our prayer.**

P We thank you Lord, Heavenly King, that You have given everything for us and made us your treasured possession. We ask that you will help us to put you first and that we seek first Your Kingdom. Help us Lord to sacrifice our own needs and desire for sake of Your Kingdom.

We ask all this in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Amen.

4th Hymn: 186,