

The Kingdom of Heaven

In today's Gospel, we have Jesus telling three parables about heaven. Let's look at the first two.

The first parable tells us of a man who unexpectedly comes upon a treasure hidden in a field. It was a common practice for a wealthy person at that time to divide his wealth into thirds. One part he would keep in cash for carrying on business transactions. Another part he would invest in precious stones and jewels, which he could easily take with him if he ever had to flee from an advancing enemy army. The third part he would bury in the ground somewhere, hoping to dig it up and reclaim it when he was able to come back home. Of course, such a person did not always come home, and his buried treasure's location might not be known to anyone else. Evidently, the man in this parable happened to find such a treasure. He very likely was not even looking for it. When he came upon it, however, he recognised its value. Without hesitation, he sold all his possessions so that he could buy the field and the treasure it contained.

The dealer in costly pearls made it his business to search far and wide for the finest possible pearls. When he found a pearl more perfect in size and shape and colour than he had ever seen before, he just had to have that pearl. So he also sold all his possessions in order to buy that single perfect pearl.

The buried treasure and the costly pearl both represent the kingdom of God or Christ the Saviour, who established that kingdom and rules over it with the gospel. That kingdom is more precious than anything else in the world, and only those who are received into that kingdom can correctly evaluate their other possessions. Those who recognise God's kingdom as the ultimate good will judge their other possessions on the basis of their usefulness in supporting and extending Christ's kingdom. That is the main purpose we are to serve in this world.

Some people of today may come upon the pearl of great price while they are searching for pearls of much lesser value among the writings of the great thinkers and philosophers of this world. They do not even know that the perfect pearl exists. Once they have found it, however, and the Holy Spirit has convinced them of its value, they realise that the gospel of Christ is in a class by itself, that it is the only way of salvation for sinners.

Today the treasures of Christ's kingdom are available for all people in the sacred Scriptures. No book is easier to get than the Bible, and year by year it is becoming available in more and more translations in more and more languages. Yet many regard it only as a strange, ancient book that is difficult to understand. Without reading it themselves, they believe those who tell them that the Bible is obscure and full of contradictions. They don't realise that God's Word is a lamp unto their feet and a light for their path and that even a child can understand the fundamental message of Scripture: I am a sinner, but Jesus died for my sins. He forgives me freely and invites me to share the glories of heaven with Him and all believers. Everything else in the Bible is comprehensible to us only as we keep this central truth in mind and relate all the rest of the Scriptures to it.

Just as the two men in these parables sold everything they had in order to purchase what they had found, so the kingdom of God must be bought for all of us. But the price is much more than we could possibly pay. The whole world would not be payment enough for a single soul. The filthy rags of our own personal righteousness could not even begin to make a down payment. The only possible solution was for someone else to pay the price for us, and the only one who could do that was God's holy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The price He paid was His own holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. Now He offers us all the blessings of His kingdom for time and for eternity as gifts of His grace. He bought and paid for these blessings in full, not for Himself but for us. And we do not lose these treasures when we share them. The more we give them away, the more richly we possess them ourselves.