

A Pearl of Great Price

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

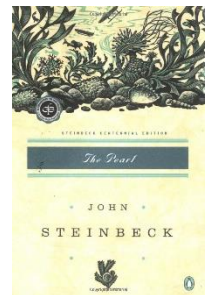
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.

November 6, 2022

Text: Matthew 13:45-46

Purpose: The parable of the pearl illustrates how valuable something or someone can be to a person. The merchant is Christ, and the pearl is the church. Christ willingly surrendered all for sinful mankind. All that call upon the name of Christ will be saved and enter into His joy. All that reject His offer of becoming part of the bridegroom are excluded.

Years ago, John Steinbeck wrote a classic story called, "*The Pearl*." In that story, a poor family's life is completely changed when the father finds a large pearl. Before finding the pearl, they were so poor, that the local doctor would not even treat their son for a scorpion bite. But once they found the pearl, everyone came to see them. But as you might guess, their motives were not for the sick child. Instead, everyone wanted to steal the pearl.



As the story progresses, the pearl is buried, hidden again in the middle of the night, stolen by a friend, then their friend is chased down and accidentally killed. The villagers attempted to find this family and bring justice for that man's death. Their home was burned down, and they were forced to flee to another friend's home. But someone suspected they didn't die in the house fire and tracked them to their hiding place.

Finally, the three trackers found the family and the man who found the pearl killed the trackers as well. During the struggle, their only son was shot and killed. This last tragedy finally broke the heart of the couple. Carrying their dead son in their arms, they headed to the sea and in an attempt to rid their lives of problems created by this instant wealth, the book ends with him casting the pearl back into the sea.

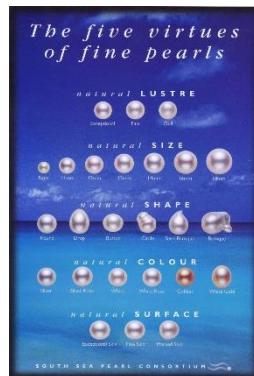
This “*pearl of great price*” cost this family the death of their son, their home, their livelihood, and a loss of hope.

Today’s parable is about a “pearl of great price.” Typically, people approach this parable by saying that the sinner is the merchant and the pearl is Christ. The sinner sells all that he has so he can buy salvation through Christ. He works and he pays any price to get his soul saved. There is even a hymn that says,



I have found the pearl of greatest price.
 My heart doth sing for joy.
 And sing I must for Christ is mine;
 Christ shall be my song employ.

However, if you think about it, the unsaved people I know, are doing all they can to stay away from salvation and the things of God. This morning they are out cutting their grass, going to the park, shopping at Wal-Mart, laying on the

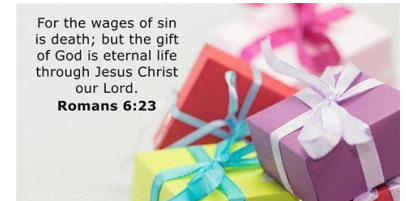


beach, sleeping in, vacuuming the house – anything to keep from being in church.

To begin with, who is looking for beautiful pearls? Are sinners looking for salvation? No. We are commanded to go and seek those that are lost. They don’t know they are lost, so we need to go and tell them the good news of Jesus Christ.

Let’s think for a minute, if a sinner wanted to seek salvation, do you think they would have enough righteousness to save purchase it? No.

A sinner is dead in their trespasses and sins and the salvation that is offered by Christ is not for sale. Salvation is a gift from God to us that receive it. *“For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* (John 3:16) God so loved that He gave. In Romans 6:23 we are told that *“the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*



We find that the real interpretation of the parable is this: The merchant is Jesus and pearl is the church. Jesus was willing to surrender His heavenly home in heaven and come and redeem us. The cost of the redemption was great, because it cost God the death of His son, Jesus Christ, even the death of the cross. It is God who is willing to pay any price to save a people from a death in Hell.



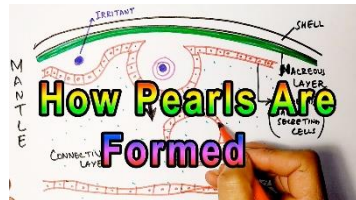
2 Corinthians 8:9 reminds us, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.” He has redeemed us back to God – He has bought us.

There are many lessons given in the Bible drawn from nature. In the parables of Jesus, we find many lessons in seeds, vineyards, fig trees, sheep and goats, and today, in a pearl. Today, we can learn a lot about the Lord and His church. Notice several lessons from the pearl.

The Lord was trying to tell us in this short parable that there are many similarities between a pearl and the church.

I. A PEARL IS FORMED BY SUFFERING¹

We find that a pearl is formed when an oyster gets a grain of sand trapped in the soft flesh inside its shell. This piece of sand irritates the tender oyster and it responds by coating the grain of sand with layer upon layer of saliva and calcium. The pearl is the product of pain and suffering.



The pearl was never considered very valuable by the Israelites. Several verses of scripture give us this impression. In Job 28:18 we see that pearls were classified as coral. Although the pearl was not considered valuable among the Hebrews, it was very valuable to the Gentiles. When Christ used the word “beautiful pearls” (v. 45), I can see the disciples pausing and looking at each other and saying, “Why is He using a story about pearls?” The Jews considered pearls costume jewelry.

Let us look again at Christ as the Merchant. When Christ came to earth, He saw man in sin, and He took man’s sin upon Himself – our sin was that foreign matter. He was made sin for us. Dr. J. Vernon McGee² has quoted someone as saying, “I got into the heart of Christ by a spear wound.” Christ “... was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities...” (Isaiah 53:5) The church of Jesus Christ was formed from the sufferings of Jesus on the cross!



II. THE PEARL WAS FORMED FROM SOMETHING WORTHLESS

When a pearl is being made inside an oyster, the original thing that caused it to form was actually a piece of junk. That tiny grain of sand was worthless. If you think about it from the churches stand point, we too are worthless. Without Christ, all of us are hell bound sinners.



Ephesians 2:1-3 reminds us that we once were dead, but now we are alive.

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

The good news is that Christ loved us just as we are. Once a sinner comes to Christ, then He transforms you into something beautiful.

III. THE PEARL IS ALSO A COMPOSITE

If you think about what makes up a pearl, it is made up of several different offending materials. It is formed by the saliva of the pearl, calcium, and whatever else the oyster can coat on that grain of sand. Individually they are worthless, but combined with suffering and time; it becomes a pearl of great price.

Isn't that the way the church is? The church is made up of all kinds of people with all kinds of backgrounds. We need to



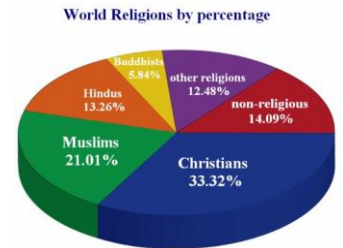
be willing to allow our spirits to not become trapped into believing that our church should only be made up of people like us. I heard of someone in another church make the comment, “Those kids from the other side of town can come. Their parents can also come if they are of the right caliber.”

We do not need to get into the business of judging others simply on the basis of them being the “right caliber.” We need to recognize that we are ALL sinners in need of a Saviour. We need to realize that our number one common point is the blood of Jesus Christ. He should be our common bond. We do not need to directly or indirectly tell someone that they don't belong here because they are “not our kind.”

IV. THE PEARL'S GROWTH IS GRADUAL

After the grain of sand lands inside the oyster, it can take up to three years for the oyster to produce a pearl. Slowly and patiently the pearl becomes larger and more valuable.

The Lord is also gradually building up the church in the world. It has been growing for almost 2000 years and the Holy Spirit is still calling sinners to salvation in Christ. We may think that there are enough churches in our community. But our churches could not contain them if everyone came to church on one Sunday.



Today, Christianity accounts for about 1/3 of all religions in the world.

If you think about the analogy of the pearl as your own spiritual growth process, you can see that many times it takes suffering and pain in order to bring about the Christ-like qualities we should exhibit. I don't like the suffering I experience in life, but if I reflect upon it, those experiences have made me a more compassionate and understanding person. If you think about your life, maybe you will also see that is true.

The saintliest people I know have experienced pain and heartache. The end result is a pearl of great price.

V. ANOTHER ASPECT OF THE PEARL IS THAT IT'S A HIDDEN WORK

We have been talking for several weeks about seeds and how they are buried in the ground. You cannot see the moment the seed dies to self and it begins to germinate. After some time, you can see the results of the growth, but you will only know its true character by the fruit it produces. Just as the wheat and tares are similar, so too are people.



You cannot truly know the heart of a person. Only God knows that person. We may sit here Sunday after Sunday and make judgments about people we know and say they are or are not a Christian, but the truth is, we are meddling in something that only God needs to judge.

VI. THE PEARL BECOMES A VALUABLE OBJECT

When you put several perfect pearls together, you will find that they can actually be worth a lot of money. It all depends on the quality, quantity, and symmetry.



The church is worth a fortune to God! He paid a high price to save the individuals from hell that make up the church. It cost Him the death of His Son.

As Christians, we are to be salt and light in a world filled with rottenness and darkness. In many ways, the church should be worth a fortune to the world. The church serves

as a restraining force against the tide of evil that presses at the moral underpinnings of our society. Collectively we as a church can make an impact on our society by praying, giving, working, and sacrificing.

We cannot make a difference sitting in the pews – we need to bring Christ to our world.

VII. THE PEARL ALSO REPRESENTS UNITY

When you compare a pearl to other valuable gems or stones, the pearl is the only one that cannot be cut. Large diamonds can be cut and the smaller pieces can be shaped and formed into valuable stones. But you cannot cut a pearl. If you do, it becomes worthless.

Many people in the world today see the church as divided. Some point to the fact that there are different denominations, different sets of doctrine, or different styles of worship. But the true church of Jesus Christ is made up of Baptists, Methodists, Assembly of God, Church of God, Holiness, Messianic Jews, and other Christian denominations and groups. The central unifying factor is what have you done with Jesus Christ. If salvation comes by Christ alone and his atoning work at Calvary, then we are brothers and sisters in Christ.



Christ becomes the unifying factor, not our denominations, doctrines, or disciplines. Think about how influential we would be in our community if all the churches came together instead of living like that other church was the

enemy. It doesn't look good on Jesus when His people cannot get along!

VIII. A PEARL REFLECTS LIGHT

When it comes to pearls, they are great at reflecting light. They are not the originator of light; they only reflect what they are around.



Individually, you become and reflect what you are around. If you are around negative people, they eventually will rub off on you and you will be negative. If you are around people that are doing things that they should not be doing, then eventually it can become something you are doing. If you come to church, meditate on the things of God, then what you learn will eventually be reflected in your life.

The church is not supposed to toot its own horn – “Look what we are doing.” The church is supposed to be a house of prayer and worship. The church is supposed to lift up to the world what Christ has done for us. The church is supposed to be a place where love and acceptance is radiated. It can be if we spend time with the master and not become consumed by the allure of the world.

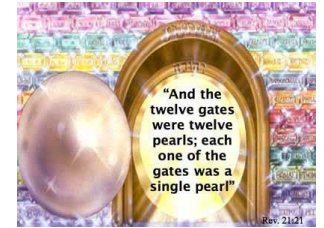
IX. THE PEARL IS A THING OF GREAT BEAUTY

For centuries pearls have been used as a thing to adorn. They serve as objects of great beauty. The church can also be a thing of great beauty as well! It is a collection of sinners saved by the grace of God and headed to a city prepared by



Christ Himself. In the Book of Revelation, we see the church illustrated as a bride adorned and ready for her bridegroom. The church may not look like it is doing good here on earth, but one day, the collected church, the bride of Christ, the Pearl of Great price will adorn the throne room of heaven perfectly.

I smiled this week when I realized that the twelve gates of heaven, as mentioned in Revelation, were made up of pearls. What a beautiful picture of what God is attempting to do in unifying His creation of imperfect, but valuable people.



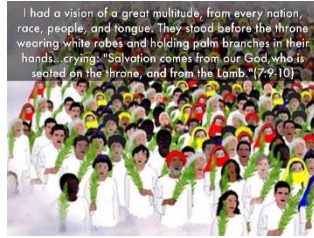
If you examined this parable in the Biblical context, you will see that the Lord chose the symbolism of the pearl for a particular reason.

Originally, this parable was paired with another parable, the parable of a treasure hidden in a field. When you take these two parables together, you can see that the treasure hidden in the field was a story that the Jews could identify with. The treasure chest represented Israel. God had chosen them and hid them there in the Promised Land. Now God has sent His only Son to sell all that He has and redeem that hidden treasure.



The story of the pearl of great price was one that the Gentiles could accept. To a Gentile, a pearl was very valuable. To the hearer's, the story had a larger impact than we usually understand.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is one where Jesus died for both the Jew and the Gentile. Christ is calling the entire world to Himself. He paid for it because we could not. Out of gratitude for His love for us, we need to begin reflecting His love for each other, we need to welcome others into our fellowship, no matter how different they are. We need to get serious about studying and understanding God's word, we need to recognize our time is short on this earth.



One day, those that are in Christ, will be gathered around the throne of heaven and we will look across a great sea of humanity. People from all nations have been purchased by God for a great price. Our loved ones that are in Christ, are now gathered there with Christ.

John Steinbeck's story about "The Pearl" ended on a tragic note. The pearl was cast into the sea, and all that was valuable to that family, was now lost. But God's story will end on a triumphant note. God cast His "pearl of great price," Jesus Christ, into that sea of humanity, and has ransomed all that call upon His name. That great reunion in heaven will focus our attention on the One that has ransomed, redeemed, and regenerated us.

If you are not in Christ, I invite you to accept Him as your own. Apart from Christ, there is nothing. All that we count of value will be destroyed. Only what is built on the foundation of Christ will last.

LET US PRAY

Notes

¹Outline from Sermon Notebook, Matthew 13:45-46

² Some selected quotes from Dr. J. Vernon McGee, (Matt. 3:45-46), Through the Bible, Vol. 4. page 79-80.