

July 26, 2020

Matthew 13:44-52

# “Jesus, Priceless Treasure!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In our Gospel lesson for this morning we have three parables. The first one is about hidden treasure, the second about the pearl of great value, and the third about a net thrown into the sea. They are all about Jesus. He is our Priceless Treasure. His rule in our lives is about the free treasure of the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

In the time of Jesus, people often would hide great treasure such as gold and jewels. Much of it had to do with the dangers and uncertainties of life. Richard C. Trench reports that people of wealth often divided what they had into three parts: one for doing business, another part converted into precious stones with which to flee, if necessary, and a third part to be buried in a safe place. So it could happen that someone would die, and the buried treasure would be lost until it was found by someone else. And we read in our Gospel lesson: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

God's free treasure, that is hidden in the field of Scripture, is to be found. The field appears to be plain, common, and ordinary, but it contains the most wonderful treasure that anyone could possibly have. In fact, it is so great that it causes one to be immediately willing to give up everything to have it. Paul writes (Phil. 3:8-11):

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith - that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

The treasure that Christ gives to us in the field of Scripture is certainly a free gift. Still, it cost Jesus everything for us to have it, and this we should remember. Jesus paid a heavy price for our sin that we might have him and all that is good. Though it is free for us, the parable of the hidden treasure speaks of a certain reality that comes with the treasure. Every child of God is bid to lose all that would prevent him or her from possessing Christ and all that he so freely gives. What is lost then is really no loss when one understands what has been given. This is what it means for us to sell everything in order to gain the treasure. The child of God has no aim to keep what is now corrupted. There is no desire to exchange the wreck we are and the wreck we've made for the new order of things in Christ Jesus. The buyer should have no problem with losing what is no longer of any value when faced with the truest treasure that lasts forever. As Jesus says in Matthew 16:25-27, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done."

The next parable in our lesson is that of The Pearl of Great Value. Jesus says, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” In this parable there is an emphasis on the merchant who is seeking the very best that this world has to offer. He is on a quest for excellent pearls, until he suddenly finds one pearl that is above all the rest. It is “one” and there isn’t another or a second to it. He sells all his other pearls, “all that he has,” and he buys the pearl that is above all other pearls. He sells what he thought was fine for the most excellent of all. For him to sell means that his whole heart was transferred from other noble interests to the one supreme interest, who is Jesus Christ and his powerful pardon and salvation.

Now we are brought to the last of the three parables: The Parable of the Net Thrown into the Sea. Jesus says:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The seine, or dragnet is the largest kind of net. It is weighted below and has floats on top, sometimes sweeping up to a half a mile of water. This net is to be understood as the gospel treasure. The sea is the world. As the gospel net sweeps through the world it collects all kinds of fish. What follows is an ordinary scene when fishermen haul the net onto the beach and sit down picking out the good fish from the worthless. The worthless fish will be thrown away.

The similarities between this parable and the parable of the weeds at the start of Matthew 13 are evident. Angels will separate the wicked from those who believe in Jesus. They will throw the bad fish into the furnace of hell. There is no mention here of what is done to the good fish in terms of the glory and bliss that is of the kingdom. Good fish believe in Jesus who is their Priceless Treasure. The bad fish are caught by the net of the gospel but do not have faith in Jesus. The treasure of Christ has never really mattered to them.

Now, you by grace have seen the glorious treasure hidden in the field. You have seen the Pearl of Great Price. You are even now in the sea while the great net is enclosing in on you to be dragged onto the beach where faith and unbelief will be forever separated. You have seen what is priceless and that which is fleeting. Jesus says in Matthew 6:19-21, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

It is a priceless treasure, for it is a treasure that will never pass away as all others do. What greater gift can be given than what Christ has given to us on the cross? For we were lost, miserable creatures, conquered by sin, death, and the power of the devil, but in Jesus our Savior, we have been freed from all,

delivered from the place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth - a forever crying out over the lost treasure, and a forever pain, anguish, and anger of not ever being able to have what has been lost. The point of our Gospel lesson as a whole is very simple. The kingdom of heaven outweighs in value all else. The one who knows and believes this to be true will give up everything to have it. May God grant us grace to do just that.

There are many fine things in this creation. We are bid to give thanks to God for the life he has given to us. However, the down here is not more important than the one who made it. That which has fallen into corruption is not above he who is good and gives all that is good. There are no fine and noble pursuits in this life that are greater than Jesus, our Priceless Treasure. We live our lives, we give thanks to God for rescuing us, but nothing can compare to that which has been promised to us in Jesus. We have been raised not to live in our old life, or in an old order of things that is passing away. Rather we have been raised in Christ to see beyond what is immediately before us - to see a new order of things that is forever.

Paul writes in Colossians 3:1-4: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” May God graciously forgive our shortsightedness and help us to see clearly. And this he does for the sake of his only Son. May we then daily put to death all things that would lead us away from Jesus, who is our Priceless Treasure. May we fervently pray, “Thy kingdom come ...” as we do so in the Lord’s prayer. As Luther explains in his *Large Catechism*:

From this you perceive that we pray here not for a crust of bread or a temporal, perishable good, but for an eternal inestimable treasure and everything that God Himself possesses; which is far too great for any human heart to think of desiring if He had not Himself commanded us to pray for the same. But because He is God, He also claims the honor of giving much more and more abundantly than any one can comprehend - like an eternal, unfailing fountain, which, the more it pours forth and overflows, the more it continues to give.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott