

“His Treasured Possession”

Ah, a “treasure hidden in a field” – “one pearl of great value.” You’d go and sell all you have in order to buy that treasure, wouldn’t you? You’d go and sell all you have to buy this priceless pearl, wouldn’t you? You’d give up everything you have for Jesus, wouldn’t you? After all, if you have Jesus – you have the forgiveness of all your sins – you have eternal life – salvation and heaven are yours!

Why then is it such a struggle to come and hear God’s Word? Why do you live as if you can live without His life-giving Body and Blood? You have a hard time giving up a ballgame for Jesus. You hem and haw about giving up a portion of your salary, if you even give it a thought at all. Asking a blessing and giving thanks for His daily bread is often not even on your radar screen.

Dearly beloved, if these parables are about what you do in order to get Jesus, a priceless treasure – then you, and I, and all people – are relegated to the furnace room, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

“Have you understood all these” parables, Jesus asks His disciples – and with great confidence they answer, “Yes!” And we’re right there with them – thinking we have the Kingdom of God all figured out and yet, we always get it so wrong.

In our sinful state, we are always getting in the way – getting in the way of Jesus – interpreting everything in a man-centered way. We hear these parables and automatically think about what we can, and should do, to get the treasure.

You realize that’s absolutely contrary to the Gospel, don’t you? Are we the creators of all things in heaven and on earth? Do we ascend into heaven to prove our righteousness before God? Do we search out and find Jesus, boldly and confidently entering the Kingdom of God, standing on our own two feet?

Today God calls us to repent of such thinking – to confess that we have not understood His parables, His kingdom, His Gospel. Once again, we have sinned against the chief commandment – we have not feared, loved and trusted in God above all things – we have lived as if we were God.

Our foolishness is best revealed with the third parable that Jesus speaks to us today. The Kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea which gathers all kinds of fish – and when it's full, it's dragged to shore – where the “good” are sorted into containers, and the “bad” are thrown away.

We don't throw the net, drag in the haul, or sort the fish. At the close of the age (on the Last Day) – we will not distinguish the evil from the righteous – throwing out the evil and gathering the righteous into heaven. That's not our work – that's God's work.

The Kingdom of God is Christ-centered – it's His rule and reign, His work. We do not choose Him – He chooses us. We don't find Him – He finds us. And so it is in the first two parables as well. It is Jesus who finds us – the treasure hidden in a field – the pearl of great value.

Now, our fallen, sinful nature objects to such an interpretation. On the one hand we don't like being lost ones or hidden. We like to be in charge – we like to have a hand in everything – we like to garner at least some of the credit.

God's Word clearly describes who we are by nature – we are spiritually dead, blind, and enemies of God. And so if there is any saving work to be done – He must do it all. And that makes us dependent ones – and our pride hates being dependent.

On the other hand, we don't like Jesus' interpretation of the Kingdom because we know all too well that we are not a “treasure” – that we have no great value. We readily confess our unworthiness – that we have sinned in thought, word and deed – and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition.

We are sinners – one and all – who deserve to be thrown on the trash heap – to be cast into the fiery furnace – to spend eternity weeping, and gnashing our teeth.

Now we are finally getting somewhere. Now we can understand the parables that Jesus speaks to us. Now the Gospel shines brightly. The Gospel is about who God is – and in Jesus, sinners see most clearly God's grace – that He is merciful to us.

We don't deserve God's love, His choosing, His finding, His saving work. But God has created you – and in spite of your sinful ways – you are precious to Him. To use the language from the Old Testament reading – “The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession.”

And so He has sent His only-begotten Son to purchase you – to gather you – to have you for Himself. Jesus, the Son of God, sells all that He has – He leaves the glorious confines of His heavenly home – coming into His creation, to redeem His treasured possession.

God becomes man in Jesus Christ, so that He might sell all that He has – to be rejected, tortured, and killed – because you are so precious to Him. Jesus has given His life for you, literally – and by His blood, He purchases you from sin, death and the devil – so that you may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom.

That's the treasure of the Kingdom – that YOU are saved by God's grace, through faith, on account of all that Jesus has done for you.

“Have you understood all these things?” Yes, Lord, I believe – help me in my unbelief. And so He does – because “the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps His covenant and steadfast love” with you. “For you” – His precious ones – His treasured possession.

Forgiven in Christ, we give thanks to God for being merciful to us sinners. Thanks be to God, through our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Deuteronomy 7:6-9

“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.

Romans 8:28-39

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

St. Matthew 13:44-52

“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.

“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.

“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.

“Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.” And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”