

## ***“Jesus’ Priceless Treasure – You!”***

It’s getting harder and harder for the disciples of Jesus to follow Him. The dark clouds are gathering, and trouble is on the rise. So, Jesus takes His Twelve disciples away from the great crowds that have gathered – and into a house to be alone.

Scanning St. Matthew’s Gospel, one sees what Jesus and His disciples are dealing with. The reign of heaven is being violently attacked – the Galilean communities have failed to repent – factions of Israel’s religious leadership have set themselves against the Master --- and soon, Jesus will be rejected in His hometown – and John the Baptist will be beheaded.

Sound all too familiar? Jesus, and those who bear His name – are detested by many in our society – and some factions are aggressively attacking Christianity, seeking to eliminate us, once and for all.

And so, Jesus draws you away from the crowds today – and gathers you here in the Lord’s house. He gathers you to reassure you – that God truly is ruling and reigning over His kingdom – and that it is good and right for you to continue to follow Him.

Jesus sets three parables before you today – to comfort you. All three deal with “the kingdom of heaven” – but when you hear that phrase – don’t just think of just a person (a king), or a place (His kingdom) – but rather, think of a king who is actively ruling and reigning over His kingdom.

The first two – the Parable of the Hidden Treasure, and the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price – are very similar parables with some repetitive language. Both involve a man who finds a valued object, and then he “goes and sells everything he has and buys” that thing which is so valued by him.

The question that often arises is – WHAT is that valued object – WHAT is this “treasure hidden in a field” – WHAT is this “one pearl of great value”? And it is at this point that we often go astray – mistakenly thinking that the “treasure” and the “pearl” are Jesus, or His salvation, or heaven (or something like that, related to God).

One can't be blamed for thinking that way – after all, as we sing in the hymn – Jesus is a “Priceless Treasure.” However, if Jesus is the treasure, then YOU must be the one who goes and sells everything to purchase it – but as you know from God's Word – you cannot purchase Jesus, His forgiveness, God's grace, or salvation.

IF that were the point of these parables – THEN what are you willing to give up to obtain the priceless treasure? Would you give up your reputation, your health, your money, your family? Would you give up your life?

In these days when Jesus is despised and hated – would you give up EVERYTHING – and cling to Him alone? While tempted to give a hearty YES to that question – the truth is that day in and day out, we reject Him, deny Him – all the while clinging to other things we value so much.

IF Jesus is teaching that you must sell everything in order to buy God's treasure – THEN these parables are not in the least bit reassuring. IF obtaining the treasures of the kingdom of heaven is up to us – THEN it's “end of story” for us. It can only end in failure. And we are banished to the furnace room where there is weeping & gnashing of teeth.

However, these parables (like the rest of Holy Scripture) are about the redeeming work of Jesus Christ for our salvation.

The one man is Jesus – who gave up everything to purchase the treasure. He gave up the glory He possessed from eternity as He emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant in His incarnation. His entire ministry, culminating in His death and resurrection, is His redeeming work – purchasing the treasure.

Jesus is the one who goes and sells everything – even giving up His life – to buy the treasure. And YOU are that treasure, that pearl of great price – that which is so valuable to Him.

While true – that just doesn't seem right, does it? After all, Jesus is the Priceless Treasure – and I – well, I am “a poor miserable sinner.”

Dearly beloved, therein lies the true nature of God's kingdom – that He would go to such extremes to save unworthy sinners. With these parables, He is reassuring you (who live in these dark times) of His love for you. Not just a potential love – or a future love – but one which has already sold everything, and purchased you – because YOU are His treasured possession.

To use the words of our Epistle lesson: “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?”

“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” – REIGNING over the kingdom of heaven, “for you.”

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Shall the rejection of Christ in these days – the scorning of those who follow Him – the tribulations that come upon those who bear His name? NO – nothing in all creation “will be able to separate [you] from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

But there is still another parable. The Parable of the Net is also about the work of God for the sake of His beloved children, and their salvation. He speaks it into your ears today to sustain you – pointing His discouraged and disheartened disciples to the close of the age – when all will be made right.

The gathering of Jesus' disciples in this world will always be an imperfect, flawed, frustrating reality. The world will always seek to destroy the Church. The devil will always tempt you to cling to other treasures. And your own sinful flesh will be a constant reminder of your unworthiness before God.

So, Christ Himself comes to you today – to declare that, even now, you are holy and precious in God's eyes – for by His holy, precious blood, Jesus has redeemed you from all sin. And at “the close of the age” – when He sends His angels to separate the evil from the righteous – the evil will be thrown away and destroyed – and you, YOU who are righteous in Christ Jesus, will be gathered to Him for all eternity.

Dearly beloved – you are safe in Jesus – now, and forevermore. Amen.

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