

## 5. The Parables of the Hidden Treasure, the Pearl, and the Dragnet

(Matt 13: 44-50)

We are journeying through the parables of Christ, those wonderful simple stories through which Jesus opens up the mysteries of the Kingdom of God to us! The stories seem so small and clear at first glance, but if you have ears to hear, you will find that there is a lot to learn inside those stories (kind of like a mustard seed or a granule of yeast -- it looks small and dead, but inside there is so much life and growth just waiting to burst forth!)

After teaching these parables to large crowds, Jesus takes some time alone with his disciples, and gathering them together, he tells three short parables about the Kingdom of heaven. First, the Parable of the Hidden Treasure:

**“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”**

This man is going on about his life and he happens to find a treasure -- he wasn't hunting for treasure and he didn't know there would be anything in that field, but as he went by he discovered a hidden treasure. Wouldn't that be exciting! Just out of nowhere, an unexpected treasure!

But the treasure was in the field, and it wasn't his field -- so he knew that if he wanted to have this treasure, he would have to buy the field. He would have to give up everything he owned just to put together the money to buy that field.

Wow, finding a treasure is exciting -- but what would happen if you realized you had to sell all of your stuff -- your home and all of the stuff inside it. Your bike and your toys and your books and your computer! You had to trade in absolutely everything to get the treasure. You would really miss those things. You really love those things. But now you would have to sell them.

Would you do it?

Well, it would be worth it if it was a really good treasure, right?

So the man did just that. He did it “for joy” -- he wasn't even sad to give up absolutely everything he had to buy that field, because the treasure was so good!

This man saw that treasure but no one else noticed it. People had been walking by that field before, and they never saw the treasure in it. And Jesus says the Kingdom of Heaven is like that treasure! It is right there in plain sight, but not everyone recognizes that it's a treasure. Some people might see a church and think it's just a group of people getting together like a club, but other people know that it is something very special! The Holy Church is an amazing treasure just sitting there in plain view, and it is so very good that it would be worth trading everything we have just to be a part of it, to belong to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Remember the idea that some people have 'ears to hear' so that when they hear Jesus' parable, they don't just hear that simple story He's telling, but they also understand His message about the Kingdom of God? They can hear a deeper meaning in the story.

This is the same kind of idea -- this one man had 'eyes to see'! While others could only see the empty field, he could see the treasure inside it. What do you suppose made this man able to see the treasure when others couldn't? Jesus doesn't tell us the answer to that question, but we do remember what He taught us in the Parable of the Sower. God plants seeds in all of us, and the soil of our hearts determines whether those seeds can grow into great faith. This man had a heart of good soil, and when God's seed came onto it, it started to take root and grow right away! His faith grew so fast that he gave up everything else he had ever had, and he joyfully obtained the treasure!

This parable is about people who are not really looking for God, who aren't even thinking that they want to find a religion or be a Christian, and one day they just stumble across it. They hear about Jesus and His Holy Church, and they get really excited about it. They can see what others couldn't -- they see what an amazing treasure the Kingdom of God is, and they understand immediately that it is so important and wonderful that they should give up everything else to get it!

The next parable Jesus tells is about people who don't just stumble across the Church, but who instead have spent a long time searching for it. They have looked and looked. He says,

**“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.**

Many people spend years searching in their hearts for God. They see so many different religions and ideas in this world, and they study all of them and try them out, hoping to find the one that will lead them to the Truth, to God. They are like pearl merchants. They hunt around through the world looking for beautiful, valuable pearls of wisdom. They have found many pearls - there are so many teachings and philosophies in this world!

But one day, this pearl merchant finds a very special pearl. It is the best pearl he has ever seen, and he has seen a lot of pearls!

The pearl is not really hidden like covered up or tucked away out of view, but it's more like people see the pearl and don't recognize how valuable it is -- they think it's just another pearl.

But this merchant has eyes to see!

St. John Chrysostom said, "He that possesses the pearl knows that he is rich, but others often do not know that they have a pearl in their hands, because the pearl is not big: the same can also be said about the truth. Those possessing it know that they are rich, but unbelievers, not understanding the value of this treasure, do not know of our wealth."

This merchant realizes that the Pearl of Great Price is truly the best kind of riches to have -- the treasure of the Kingdom of Heaven is more amazing than any other pearl. But people who don't have eyes to see it just pass it by!

When the merchant recognized that this is a Pearl of Great Price, what did he do? The same thing the man who found the treasure in the field did! He sold absolutely everything he had -- all the other pearls he has purchased and everything else he ever had -- so that he could buy the Pearl of Great Price.

Whether you just stumble across the Holy Gospel and find Jesus accidentally, or you spend a lifetime hunting through all the philosophies of the world, when you find the treasure, you must sell absolutely everything you have to gain the Kingdom.

What does that mean? Does that mean that Christians have to sell their houses and their toys if they want to be a part of the Kingdom of God?

Not exactly. You might have a home or a toy or some stuff you really love. But you should always remember that the Kingdom is the most important and valuable thing you can have. Your relationship with God, your love of Christ and your ability to follow Him are the most important things. They are definitely more important than stuff.

If some other thing gets in the way of that, if you have to choose between the Kingdom and something else, you should always choose the Kingdom, because it is more valuable than all the other things. It is always worth giving up everything else so that we can have Christ.

Finally, Jesus said,

**“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”**

Sometimes fishermen use dragnets, which are huge nets that they throw into the water and then they drag them across the water to catch anything in the path of that net. They throw out big dragnets, and catch a whole bunch of fish at once! Of course, they aren't able to choose what gets caught in the net -- they'll catch the kind of fish they want, like maybe tuna or sardines, but they will also catch whatever else is swimming by -- so mixed in with the good fish there are probably some gross kinds of fish that they would not want to eat!

They bring in the nets full of all sorts of fish, and then the fisherman separate out the good fish from the bad fish, and they keep the good ones but throw the bad ones away.

This might remind you of the wheat and the tares! Remember how the farmer had to sort out the wheat, the plants that are good for food, from the tares that the enemy had planted, which don't produce anything good to eat? Here we see fishermen sorting out the good fish from the bad fish in much the same way.

In both of those parables, we are reminded that at the end of days, on Judgement Day, Jesus will sort out the good from the bad.

We remember that the tares were planted by the enemy to grow up alongside the wheat and choke it out. Were the bad fish sent by the enemy? No. The fish were just naturally all together in the sea, and the nets just caught them all up together! So this time, the story is not about how the enemy plants bad things among the good.

You may remember that some of the disciples were fishermen, and when Jesus called them, “He said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men!”” (Matt. 4:19) This parable is about being fishers of men!

When the apostles are sent out into the world to tell everyone about Jesus Christ, it will be like fishing -- they will cast out their nets by talking with people and giving sermons about Jesus. They'll cast out their nets, and they'll catch a bunch of fish, but not all the fish, right? Most people won't come along, but a good many people will be very interested in Jesus. They'll be enthusiastic and they'll even be baptized and going to Church. But not every single Christian will turn out so great. Some of us will be really good fish who bear spiritual fruit, and some of us won't -- those are the bad fish, and at the end of days, Jesus will sort us all out.

So in the Last Judgement, it's not just the enemy's tares who are going to be thrown out. It's also those Christians who joined the Church, but kind of gave up. They never grew spiritually and yielded spiritual fruit. This parable is a warning to all of us that our life is not just about showing up and saying we follow Jesus -- if we want to be gathered into the Kingdom, we are going to have to put in the effort to grow!

So after telling the other parables to large crowds, Jesus gathers His disciples around them to let them know that whether people just happen to find the treasure of the Kingdom along their way, or whether they search all their lives to find it, once they find the Kingdom, they are going to have to give up everything else so that they can become part of the Kingdom! They have to stop caring so much about their possessions and all the worldly ideas and plans, so that they want only the Kingdom. And then He tells them that many people might come into the Church, but not everyone is going to follow through with the effort to grow in the Spirit.

Jesus shows them that you have to really love the Kingdom above all other things, and you have to put in the effort to keep growing in that love, if you truly want to live in the Kingdom of Heaven.

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## QUESTIONS:

Was the treasure in the field - which we heard about in the first parable - something special? What makes you say that?

- *We don't know what the treasure was that the man found in the field, but we do know that it was special. We know this because he sold absolutely everything so that he could buy the field and have the treasure!*

What did the man in the second parable discover, that St. John Chrysostom compared to the truth?

- *The man discovered a pearl: and it was not just any beautiful pearl - it was the Pearl of Great Price!*

In the parable of the dragnet, where many fish are caught, but not all of them are kept, what is Jesus warning His followers about?

- *He is warning them - and all of us - that if we want to be gathered into the Kingdom, we are going to have to put in the effort to grow!*

## **FOR DISCUSSION:**

*In the first parable, the man found something amazing: a treasure. He wanted to keep it, so he sold everything and bought the field where the treasure was. What would you have done if you found a treasure in a field? Have you ever found something amazing? What did you find? Did you keep it? What's your best treasure?*

*Today we heard about how God's Kingdom is a treasure, and that we should do everything that we can to get it, and to live according to His Truth, so that we will be kept when the "dragnet" at the end of time collects everyone together. What ideas do you have of ways to love God's Kingdom and His truth even more? Which will you do first?*