

## The Costliness of Possessing Christ



David Wilkerson April 9, 2012

Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables: “All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been *kept secret* from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 13:34-35, my italics).

To many Christians today, the parables sound very simple. Yet according to Christ, each parable holds an incredible secret. There’s a hidden, kingdom truth in every parable Jesus told — and that truth is discovered only by those who diligently seek for it.

Many believers skim over the parables quickly. They think they see an obvious lesson and quickly move on. Or, they dismiss the parable’s meaning as not applying to them. They turn to Paul’s writings instead, seeking “deeper truths.” But I think of two parables containing some of the most profound truth a believer could lay hold of:

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto *treasure hid in a field*; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a *merchant man, seeking goodly pearls*: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (13:44-46, my italics).

You may think, “What’s so hidden about these truths? We all know Jesus is the pearl of great price, the treasure buried in the field. That’s no great secret.”

I tell you, there’s hidden manna in these two parables, and only a handful of believers have discovered it. Many have never taken the time to dig as the man in this parable dug. Indeed, these two desperate figures — the digging man and the dogged merchant — make Jesus’ meaning clear: God’s secrets must be desired above all else in life.

The Bible states clearly there are secrets of the Lord: “His secret is with the righteous” (Proverbs 3:32). These secrets have been unknown from the foundation of the world. Now Matthew tells us they’re buried in Jesus’ parables, hidden truths that have power to set Christians free. Yet few are willing to pay the high cost of finding them.

We all know the gift of salvation is free. Jesus paid the price of our salvation in full for all eternity: “Being justified freely by his grace” (Romans 3:24). Moreover, Christ invites us to drink from his ever-flowing fountain of grace: “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

Yet in his parable of the sower, Jesus warns that not everyone who confesses him will continue on in faith. According to the parable, some seed (the gospel) will fall on good ground. That seed will take root, grow and bear fruit. But other seed will fall on stony ground and wither before it can develop roots. Still other seed will fall on thorny ground and Satan will quickly rob it.

I believe the great falling away Jesus prophesied is already taking place. Many are turning aside from convicting, soul-stirring preaching to seek teachers who please their flesh. They have been deceived by what Paul calls

“another gospel, another Jesus.”

Jesus foresaw all of this, looking down through history to our time and predicting everything that would come: the rejection of godly reproof, the rise of a gospel of ease, the shallow teaching of flesh-pleasers, the falling away of multitudes. Indeed, he warned that in the last days the love of many believers would wane.

This is why Jesus called a private session with his disciples. “Jesus sent the multitudes away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field” (Matthew 13:36). Jesus wanted to open his followers’ eyes to the deeper meanings of his parables. He knew they needed truth that would carry them through times of great seduction.

In this closed meeting, Christ told the two parables about the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price. These parables take up only three verses of the Bible, yet embedded in them are the Lord’s secrets hidden from the foundation of the world. I believe they reveal to us the costliness of possessing Christ — and that we are to dig with all our hearts to find the treasures of life hidden in him: “Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). Many Christians go through life satisfied with just enough faith to get by. Only those who pursue Jesus with their whole hearts will lay hold of his abundant life.

Jesus begins by saying, “Let me tell you what the kingdom of heaven is like” (see Matthew 13:44). Christ isn’t speaking here of heaven as we think of it, the realm in glory with the Father. He’s referring to the kingdom of heaven on earth, saying, “Here’s how you can possess the fullness of heaven in your heart now.”

How do we obtain heaven on earth? The two parables make it clear: by possessing Christ in all his fullness. And that is a costly endeavor.

### 1. The Treasure in the Field

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field” (Matthew 13:44). The field here represents the Christianized world. It is every area where the gospel has been preached and received. And the man laboring in the field represents everyone who serves Jesus.

This man has learned from a reliable source that treasure is buried somewhere in that field. While other field workers labor halfheartedly, this man digs furiously, spending hours, days looking for the treasure. He has set his heart on unearthing God’s hidden treasure, knowing the only way he’ll find it is to seek it with everything he’s got.

What is the treasure he’s looking for? It is the incredible discovery that Christ is all he needs. His treasure is knowing that all joy, direction and purpose — indeed, the very riches of heaven — are his in Jesus. It doesn’t matter what trials and tests confront him. In Christ he has been given every resource, for every dimension of life.

When this man finally finds the treasure, he does a curious thing: He immediately hides it. “Which when a man hath found, he hideth” (13:44). Why would he hide this wonderful, newfound wealth? We find a clue in Paul’s testimony: “When it pleased God, who separated me...and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood; neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia” (Galatians 1:15-17).

Paul had been given an incredible revelation of Christ. Why did he choose to keep it secret? It was because this treasure was absolutely precious to him, dearer to him than anything. He had served God with zeal as a Pharisee but without knowledge of the truth (see Romans 10:2). Now that Paul had found that the truth was Christ, he wouldn’t be robbed of it. So he went to the desert of Arabia to hide his treasure.

In essence, Paul was “selling everything he had to buy the field where the treasure was buried.” He was declaring, “I don’t want anything to sidetrack me from this great truth I’ve found in Christ. I can’t hear anyone else’s opinion about it right now. I’ve got to possess it for myself. Then I’ll share it with others, after I’ve understood the full magnificence of what I’ve found.”

Here is what it cost Paul to lay hold of his treasure: “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ...I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3:7-8).

How is it possible to “buy” a pearl of great price?

This parable speaks of the man “selling everything he had to *buy the field* where the treasure was buried” (see Matthew 13:44). We know it isn’t possible to buy spiritual things with money. So how is it possible to buy “a pearl of great price” from our Lord?

Over the centuries, rich men have tried to gain eternal life by giving up their wealth. They forsook castles, lands, riches, vast herds, jewels and fine clothing, all in an effort to win Christ. They became paupers, eating meagerly and wearing animal skins. But Jesus was never found this way by anyone.

I believe Paul spent his months in Arabia “bartering” with the Father. I picture him asking, “Lord, how can I possess the full riches of Christ? What’s it going to take?”

The Father answers Paul, “Give me all your self-righteousness, your good works, your strivings to please me — and I will give you Christ’s holiness by faith alone. Surrender to me all your goals, ambitions and plans. I will give you Christ himself to live in you and through you. His desires will become yours, and you will know joy that no accomplishment could ever give you. Is winning Christ worth all that to you?”

Paul did win Christ. He emerged from the desert in full possession of his treasure, testifying, “The old Paul is dead. Now Christ is alive in me. All my ambitions are gone. Everything I wanted to do or be before, I’ve left behind in the desert. I have found my life’s treasure, and he is all-sufficient for me. Jesus is all I will ever need.”

You may ask, “Where’s the hidden mystery in this parable of the treasure?” Paul answers: “The mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:26-27). In short, the mystery is Christ himself in you. The very treasure of heaven is living within you, possessed by you!

## 2. The Pearl of Great Price

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (Matthew 13:45-46).

Who is the merchant in this parable? The Greek root explains him as a traveling wholesale trader. He was also an assayer, or tester, who made his living by evaluating costly pearls for their quality and worth.

We know Jesus is the pearl of great price found by this merchant. Christ is very costly, of incalculable value, because the merchant sells all his other possessions to gain him. My question is, who was the original owner of this costly pearl? And why would he be willing to part with it?

I believe we find the meaning of the pearl in God’s eternal purposes. Jesus is the Father’s most valued and treasured possession. Only one thing would cause the Father to give up this priceless pearl: He did it out of love. He and his Son had made a covenant before the creation of the world, and in it the Father agreed to part with his Son. He gave him up as a sacrifice, to redeem humankind.

The apostle Peter refers to the high price of this precious gift: the costly blood of Christ. Think of it: The God of the universe had made his precious pearl available to all. Yet men of the church put no value on him: “They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value” (27:9).

I tell you, the Lord must grieve today to see how little value his people place on this priceless pearl. To some, Christ is no more than a museum piece. People visit him once a week to admire him or praise him, saying, “What beauty. How utterly glorious.” But they never own the pearl. They don’t barter with the owner to possess it at any cost.

God intends his pearl to be found by those who are obsessed with possessing him. It’s as if he is saying, “My pearl is available only to those who place a great value on him.” Thus, the merchant in this parable represents a very small band of believers today. These servants have found in Jesus the answer to every need and cry of their hearts. He has become the central focus of their lives. They’ve set their hearts to go after this prize with everything in them. And they’re going to lay hold of him at any cost.

What did it cost the merchant to obtain the pearl? Remember, it was priceless. It couldn't be bought with any amount of money. There simply wasn't enough gold or silver on the earth to match its worth, and the merchant knew this. He realized he could spend his whole life amassing wealth to obtain it, but his efforts would all be in vain.

I picture the merchant telling the owner, "Look, I've got to have that pearl. I'll gladly barter my entire life time of services to you. Whatever you ask of me, I'll do. Just let me possess it." What is our Father's response to this kind of desire? "Give me your heart. That's the cost." Next we read, "When he had found one pearl of great price, [he] went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (13:46).

This merchant sold his very soul for the pearl. It cost him his mind, body and spirit, "all that he had." Yet the owner told him he would gain something in return: "You will be my bondservant. But you're going to be much more than that to me. By giving me your heart, you're letting me adopt you. I'm about to make you part of my family. Then you will be my heir. You'll own the pearl with me."

Let me tell you what these two parables mean to me personally.

Christ is the treasure chest in the field. In him, I have found all that I'll ever need. To me, that means the following:

No more trying to find purpose in ministry. No more looking for fulfillment in people. No more need to build something for God or be a success or feel useful. No more keeping up with the crowd or proving something. No more searching for ways to please people. No more trying to think or reason my way out of difficulties.

I have found what I'm looking for. My treasure, my pearl, is Christ. And all that the Owner asks of me is, "David, let me adopt you. I love you, and I have already signed the papers with my own Son's blood. You are now a joint heir with him of all I possess."

I'm still in the process of selling everything I have. I'm still giving the Father my time, thoughts, will and plans. Yet I know I'm exchanging it all for treasure. I'm trading it in to buy living water, the bread of life, the milk and honey of joy and peace. And I'm doing it all without money. The cost to me is my love, my trust, my faith in his Word.

What a bargain. I give up my filthy rags of self-reliance and good works. I lay aside my worn-out shoes of striving. I leave behind my sleepless nights on the streets of doubt and fear. And in return I get adopted by a King!

Dear saint, this is what happens when you seek the pearl, the treasure, till you find him. Jesus offers you everything he is. He brings you joy, peace, purpose, holiness. What is he worth to you? To gain him, it may cost you more than you've been willing to pay. I urge you: Start digging today.

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