



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Gospel of Matthew

“A Treasure, a Pearl, a Fisherman’s Net,” Matthew 13:44-51– TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading for this morning is found in Matthew chapter 13 verse 44 through verse 51. Remember, for those of you who have been with us that we are expounding the Gospel of Matthew and we are in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter in which our Lord is giving us some of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. And he has been expounding parables. The parables are given because of the rejection by the greater part of the nation, and made necessary in order that retributive judgment may be meted out to them for unbelief, and also they are given for illustrations of truth that those who are receptive may better understand the doctrinal matters that the Lord Jesus is discussing.

So while it may seem somewhat contradictory, these parables are given to reveal and to conceal. To reveal to the receptive and to conceal from the unreceptive.

Verse 44 is the first of the parables which our Lord gave to the disciples specifically in the house, as Matthew describes it in verse 36. Now we read beginning with verse 44,

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field; 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. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and separate the wicked from among the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.’ Jesus saith unto them, ‘Have ye understood all these things?’ They say unto him, ‘Yea, Lord.’”

May God’s blessing rest upon his word.

Our subject for this morning in the exposition of Matthew is “A Treasure, a Pearl, and a Fisherman’s Net,” which you’ll recognize is simply a summary of the three parables we have read for our Scripture reading today. Of the Lord it has been said, he is the lord of history and the lord of prophecy, and we certainly can add that therefore he is the Lord of all. He has shown himself to be the lord of history, has claimed to be that by his interpretation of the Old Testament ages. In the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter and in the 13<sup>th</sup> verse of that chapter, he has made a comment which in a sense gives us an insight into all of history up until the time of the ministry of our Lord, for he has said, “For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John,” giving us a kind of interpretation of Old Testament history when he said that.

Now in the parables of Matthew chapter 13, he has been demonstrating that he is the lord of prophecy. He is showing himself to be the one who illuminates our age, and these parables are certainly marvelously illuminating, giving us pictures of our age that enable us to understand the things that have been transpiring since the Lord Jesus was here. He has said, for example, that the inter-advent period – that is, the period between the first coming of our Lord and the second coming of our Lord – is a period in which

seed sowing shall take place. Now, he means by that the sowing of the seed of the word of God. I have in my notes at that point, may it be expository! as an expression of a wish, because I do think that this is what our Lord intended when he said that this age would be characterized as an age by which the seed of the word of God would be sown.

We have largely lost, in my opinion, the glory of the exposition of the word of God. And I do feel that our preaching should be expository preaching, in which we take the passages of the word of God and unfold as best as we are able their meaning.

Someone has said, concerning a very-well known theologian of the last generation, “He does not preach. He explains what others preach.” And what was meant by that was that he himself was a teacher that enables them to understand what the preachers were saying in the pulpit. Well, I don’t really think that should be necessary. It seems to me that in our preaching, we should be explanatory. That is, we should be clear and the result being that we understand our passage that we are having for our Scripture reading.

Well, at any rate, the Lord Jesus has said that this age is to be the age of the sowing of the seed, and I have tried to say, in the introductions to the messages over the past two or three weeks that that means that this age, being characterized as an age of the seed sowing should be just that. That is, the church should give itself wholeheartedly to the exposition of the word of God, the sowing of the seed of the word of God. And therefore, in its services, in its ministry, the word of God should be pre-eminent.

I have never felt, although I grew up in a church like this, I’ve never felt that we have a satisfactory morning service when we have the word of God relegated to a minority position in that service, in which we have 15 minutes for a sermonette rather than an exposition of holy Scripture. It seems to me truly, truly wrong to, in the service of the church, relegate the word of God to a minor part of that service. It should be the major thing, and it should always be that.

The second thing the Lord Jesus has been saying will characterize this age is that the god of this age, or Satan, will craftily intermingle his sons among the sons of the

kingdom by a seed sowing of his own. Now, that means that means that while the word of God is being propounded and expounded, and men are the recipients of its message, Satan will be sowing his seed and there will be the sons of his seed manifest among the sons of the kingdom.

We know that it is a fact of human history that in the pagan world, some men give themselves up so thoroughly to the service of sin and their god that they do, it seems literally, receive a spirit – a kind of infusion of that god. And they not only have all the sinful nature and tendencies common to all of Adam’s children, but it almost seems as if they become demonized with diabolical subtlety. They seem to possess a kind of spiritual energy that is remarkable, but it’s not a spiritual energy for that which is good or for the glory of God, but a spiritual energy for that which is wicked.

We all know that often, in the desire to expound evil doctrines, the evangelists of evil doctrines are often more active than the evangelists of the pure word of God. It’s possible that in the ancient mysteries, the initiatory ceremonies included a sight of Satan, and of the experience of becoming possessed by him. To this day, the Brahman of India, having passed through initiation, is styled, “the twice-born.” So even biblical terms such as the new birth or being born-again, these terms have not only become terms of the word of God but terms of the world.

And we have seen, even recently, the Gallup polls suggesting that there are 50 million born-again people in the United States of America. I wish it were so; I just cannot bring myself to believe that that is true. But the term “born-again” has become a term that is simply a religious term. The world is taking all of the terms that belong to the Bible and using them for themselves, but giving them different content.

I’ve been trying to, through the course of our exposition, to say things about certain heresies that Satan seems to be particularly sowing at the present time. And it seems to me the greatest heresy being sown today by Satan is the heresy of universalism. And in our well-known universities today, the doctrine of universalism, never recognized

as a human doctrine, has become a Christian doctrine. It’s a startling thing. But nevertheless, it is true. Even some of the publication ministries of our largest denominations are devoted now to the publication of commentaries and books on the Bible that propounds the doctrine that everybody, ultimately will be going to heaven.

*The Layman’s Bible Commentary*, a very well-known Bible commentary, is one illustration of this. And in that commentary is propounded the doctrine of universalism, and it is put out by one of our most respected Christian denominations. We have men who are well-regarded men in the Christian world propounding that particular teaching. One well-known Indian Christian leader has said, with reference to universalism, that the Lord Jesus has redeemed the whole of the world. “Those without Christ in the world,” he has said, are the Japanese on remote islands who kept on fighting after the war had ended, not having heard the news that the war was over.”

So the message of evangelism is not a message that men are lost, and that they need to come to Jesus Christ in order to be saved. The message is simply, everybody is a Christian, saved man, and all he needs is the knowledge that that is so. So the work of the evangelist is not to bring men to Christ, but simply to inform them that they already belong to Jesus Christ because they are human beings.

Speaking to the American Baptist Convention, this same Christian leader said, “Calling a person a non-Christian is like calling the Archbishop of Canterbury a non-Baptist. Everybody is within the ministry of Christ, whether or not he accepts it. God knows the name of every sheep; not only those who bear the name of Christian. There is nothing any man can do to stop God from loving him.” So you see, everybody’s a Christian, and the distinctions that we have such as Christianity or Judaism or Mohammedanism or Hinduism—they’re just like little, different denominations within the Christian faith. We all are Christians.

A Methodist bishop told a gathering of Methodist women, “The word of God to the world is that man is forgiven and free, that he can dare to live as a free and forgiven

man, and can declare this possibility to others who have not heard of it." So Satan is busily sowing his seed by the side of the seeds of the sons of the kingdom. And we are very foolish if we think that everything is lovely and nice during this age, and everything is lovely and nice in every Christian gathering in which we may find ourselves. Because you can be sure of this, that wherever the word of God is being sown in the power of the Holy Spirit, it is there that the evil one would most delightedly like to sow his seed as well.

The Lord Jesus has also been telling us, by the Parable of the Mustard Seed, that the outward form of the kingdom will develop from a lowly organism to a giant organization, and surely we have seen that in this age. He has also said, in connection with that, that it would become a comfortable sphere for the operation of wicked spirits, and the very fact that men who proclaim these unbiblical have a hearing in our largest and most respected denominations is evidence of the fulfillment of the words our Lord has spoken.

He has also stated that this mixed state within the kingdom of heaven in its mystery form, will continue to the end of the age. And then, there will be a final, separating judgment, in which the Lord Jesus will eliminate from his kingdom the things that offend. He will send forth the angels, and they shall gather them out and all of those who do iniquity in order that as we enter into the visibly manifested kingdom of God upon the earth, the Messianic kingdom, all who enter it will be believing men.

Now this is a disturbing picture. But it is true to history and experience. And if it is a disturbing picture, it is also a comforting picture. And it is an encouraging picture. Do you know why? Because if our Lord Jesus has so beautifully expounded the trends that have manifested themselves in this age, it is a comforting and encouraging thing, therefore, to look into the future and know that the remainder of the things that he prophesies will also come to pass just as certainly.

Therefore, we look into the future not with pessimism, but we look into the future with optimism. We know the things that are going to transpire upon the earth, but we know the Lord Jesus controls the affairs of history, and he shall bring them to their glorious consummation. So everything is optimistic for the Christian as he looks toward the future.

Well, we do want to look at our parables, so let’s look now at the Parable of the Hidden Treasure first of all. Incidentally, now, this is the first of the parables spoken to the disciples. In verse 36, we read, “Then Jesus sent the multitudes away and went into the house. And his disciples came unto him, saying, ‘Explain unto us the Parable of the Tares of the Field.’” And the Lord Jesus, in the house, began to speak only to the disciples. He expounded to them the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, and we have looked that. But now he continues to the disciples.

So, having spoken to the men of sight, as one of the commentators has put it, he now speaks to the men of faith. And I think that the fact that he is now speaking to the believers – the disciples – is evidence to the fact that we may have a parable or two that has to do with them. And I think that is exactly what we do have.

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure is a simple, artless, straightforward story very natural to the land of Palestine. There was a rabbinic saying that the only safe repository for money was the earth. So evidently, it was quite common for men to take their treasures – their coins, their gold, their silver – and put them in the ground for safe-keeping. When the Lord Jesus tells the Parable of the Talents in the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of this book, and he speaks about the man of one talent, who received his one talent and hid it, the man answers the Lord when the Lord asks him what he has done with it, he says, “Well, I hid it in the earth.” So it was very common for people to put their money in the earth. Evidently, the banks weren’t a whole sounder then than they are now, so they put their money in the earth.

Now my wife is entirely different than this. She believes the money ought to be in the hands of some merchant [laughter], and so she is, as far as I know, able to reduce a bank account to \$2.52 faster than anyone I have ever known. It happens every month, and it’s amazing how she is able to do it. Occasionally, she reduces it to minus \$2.52 due to mathematical problems, nevertheless, she is very quick in transferring money from her hands into the hands of some merchant.

When we were going through theological seminary, we didn’t put our money in the bank. We all laugh about this now, but when I was going through theological seminary, I didn’t have enough money to take it down to the bank. I felt embarrassed to say, “Would you mind opening an account for \$50?,” so we kept our money in a book. And I was very, very careful about the particular book I put it in. I had to remember exactly where my money was. I still hope that every now and then I’ll run across a five or a ten dollar bill [laughter] in one of my books of my library [more laughter].

But in the days in which this parable was told, it was customary for a man to put his money in the earth, and the Lord Jesus is telling a parable that is very true to the life of the land of Palestine at that time. But what does this parable mean?

Now, there are differing interpretations, and I want to mention two or three of these interpretations, not to degrade them, but to let you know there are different interpretations, and it is possible that my interpretation is wrong. So I want to suggest some of the others and then give you what I think is the interpretation of the parable.

Now it is the opinion of some that when the Lord Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, and the other details are given—oh by the way, incidentally, when we are reading the parables, we should remember that the Lord Jesus did not intend to say to us that the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure, only; he means that the kingdom of heaven is like all of the details given in the parable. In other words, all of the particular details forming one total picture are the likeness to which he refers.

It is the opinion of some that the church of the Lord Jesus is the treasure, and that the man who found the treasure is the Lord Jesus himself, and that when the man of the parable sells all that he has and buys that field, that is a picture of the Lord Jesus giving all that he possessed in the sacrifice on the cross for the church of the Lord Jesus.

Now, there are some biblical sentiments expressed by this, of course. It is true that the church is a kind of treasure so far as God is concerned. It’s obvious that he would not have redeemed the church if he did not have in mind for the church great purposes. But of course, the church is no great treasure in herself. And she is only valuable by virtue of that which God does for her. She is totally worthless otherwise. But nevertheless, it is true that the church has a great place in the purpose of God and might be called a treasure in that sense. And of course, it is true that the Lord Jesus gave his life for the redemption of the church.

But how could the church be “found” by the Lord Jesus when she was chosen before the foundation of the world? How could the church be represented as something the Lord stumbled over while he was wandering through a field? In the light of the fact that Paul says we are chosen in him before the foundation of the world, what is the second hiding that is referred to also, here? So while that interpretation has some things that commend it, I really do not think that it satisfies everything that is found in this context.

Still others say, no, the church is not the treasure, Israel the Nation is the treasure, because does not the Old Testament say that in the beginning of Israel’s history “A peculiar treasure will I make of Thee unto me?”—the passage in Exodus chapter 19 and verse 5 would seem to suggest that Israel is a treasure to God, and could not Israel be the treasure over which the Lord Jesus stumbles? Again, remember the primary feature of these parables is the kingdom of heaven. The period of time between the first coming and the second coming in mystery form, but ultimately, the kingdom of the heavens in its

manifested form begins at the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus and continues for a thousand years thereafter.

What he is doing is giving us things that have to do with the gathering of the sons of the kingdom during this present age, in order that they may enter that glorious Messianic kingdom of the future. And the kingdom is the thing that is stressed, and not the entities within the kingdom. The church is not found in Matthew chapter 13, so far as I can tell, nor is the Nation Israel, specifically found. He's thinking about the kingdom. He's thinking about this age, and the movements, and the works of God and of Satan that will characterize this inter-advent period.

Others have said the kingdom is the treasure and Jesus is the man finding it and giving himself for it. So, the kingdom is the treasure. With that, I certainly can agree. But is the kingdom that which the Lord Jesus finds and gives himself for? Again, that's an appealing interpretation. It has some things about it that are attractive. The kingdom is a treasure and he is speaking about the kingdom, but is the man who stumbles over the hidden treasure a fit picture of the Lord Jesus? I think not. The discovery is a surprise to the man. I don't think that this is a fit picture of the Lord Jesus. And yet again, I say, that there are some things that are appealing about that interpretation.

Let me suggest to you, with a little bit of diffidence, what I think is the correct interpretation of it. The kingdom is the treasure. The Lord Jesus is speaking about the kingdom. But the finder of the treasure is the one who becomes the believer and therefore, we are to look at this as a picture of how a man comes to the understanding and the possession of the kingdom as a treasure.

Now if that is true, if the kingdom is the treasure and the man who stumbles over it is the man who comes to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, and appropriates the blessings of the kingdom himself, then these points are made. First of all, the kingdom is something of great value, but men may fail to see it by virtue of blindness. Now we know that that is true. The kingdom is something of great value. To possess the life of

the kingdom is great. To possess the life of the kingdom and live in that future Messianic kingdom is something that is surely great, and it is held out as future for the believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I want you to know that I am looking forward to the day when I, by virtue of the grace of God, shall be able to live in that marvelous, glorious, Messianic kingdom, in which the world recognizes and must recognize the glory of our Savior God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a second thing that we may argue from this, and that is that the kingdom may be found unexpectedly. The Bible stresses this as one aspect of the truth. For example, we read in Isaiah chapter 65 and verse 1, “I was found by them that sought me not.” Isn’t that an interesting statement? I was found by them that sought me not. That is, those who weren’t paying any attention to me, were not seeking after me, have found me.

Now, every believer – well, I wouldn’t say every believer – but if we looked at our lives, we probably, every one of us, would come to the conviction that there was a time in our lives when we did not have any desire whatsoever for the relationship to the Lord Jesus, and that when we did come into that period of time in which there was a desire, it was something we recognized was not natural to us.

Now, in my case, I do not think – while I grew up in a Christian church and grew up in a Sunday School in which we studied the word of God – I do not think that I had the slightest desire whatsoever to have a part in the Messianic kingdom of Jesus or to have any personal relationship to him all through my youth. Up through my high school days and college days and on into my business experience, no desire whatsoever.

And in fact, the interest that ultimately came to my heart was awakened by means of a tea party on Sunday afternoon, and the presence of a Bible teacher at that tea party. A most unlikely thing, for in the first place, I don’t think I had been to a tea party for five years before – and I’m not sure that I attended on after that [laughter] – but at that

particular one, I stumbled over the treasure hidden in the field. And as a result of that meeting that afternoon, attended a meeting that night and through the preaching of the word that week came to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. It could truly be said of me, I was found by them that sought me not, for I was certainly not seeking so far as I know.

Now, the Bible tells us, of course, that there is none that seeketh after God; no not one. So it is true of every one of us that we do not naturally seek after God. So when you do find a person who is seeking after God, you know that God has already worked in prevenient grace.

Now, here the stress rests upon the unexpectedness of finding the treasure. And of course, thinking of Biblical illustrations, the one that stands out most strikingly in the conversion of the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus with letters in his pocket by which he might persecute the Christians further. And there, on the Damascus road, the Lord Jesus appeared to him and as a result of that experience which transformed his life, turned him completely around, the apostle became the preacher of the faith that he at one time had destroyed.

He later on said that he had, as one of his ambitions, that he might lay hold of that for which God had grasped or seized him. So, he was the kind of person who stumbled over the treasure in the field, who God, through the Holy Spirit, awakened in a moment to the significance of the treasure of the relationship to the king.

We think also of men like Philip the Apostle, who was found by the Lord Jesus. Of Nathaniel, and others.

There is another thing that this parable would seem, then, to teach, that there is such a thing as a decision involving a forsaking of all self-reliance. When the Apostle Paul speaks about his own conversion in that same passage of Philippians chapter 3, he describes the decision that he made as one of self-renunciation. Listen to what he says, "But what things were gain to me those I counted lost for Christ. Yea, doubtless and I

count all things but lost 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 refuse that I may win Christ and be found in him, not having my own righteousness which is of the Lord, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which of God by faith.”

We are not saying to you – and I do not intend to say to you – that you must give up this before you can receive Jesus Christ as your Savior. What I am saying to you is that the decision to trust Christ involves a decision to renounce [trust] in anything else. And when a person comes to faith in the Lord Jesus, there is implicit in that decision a renunciation of everything else.

Before, you had been trusting in your own good works. Before, you had been trusting in your culture. Before, you had been trusting in your education. Before, you had been trusting in your religion – or whatever it may be – but in the moment that you see the Lord Jesus on the cross as the objective basis for the saving work, and your trust moves from trust in the things that have characterized your old life to trust in him, you have moved in self-renunciation to an objective trust in the Lord Jesus that means life.

Now that comes only by virtue of the enabling, enlightening power of the Holy Spirit. It is not a work of righteousness which you do which God rewards by giving good works. It is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit by which you are turned by God to trust in the Lord Jesus. But it involves a self-renunciation. As the apostle says, “He suffered the loss of all things.”

Now this parable does not stress the divine grace behind it, and the reason that I’m stressing it is because these are two sides of the same thing. It is the divine grace that enabled this man to stumble over the treasure in the field.

Well let’s look at the parable of the precious pearl, because similar lessons are taught here, and yet there is a slightly different emphasis. He says again, “the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking fine pearls.” The pearl was one of the most valuable jewels of the ancient world. We’ve recognized the value of it, and even today to

have a string of pearls is to have something that is very valuable. We even name our girls after the term for pearl. Now, I know we call people pearl—that is, we used to. We don't like that name too much, now—well, I better not say that in an audience such as this—it's a lovely name. [Laughter] But, we have some Pearls in our family.

But did you know that the Greek word for pearl is the word from which we get the word, Marguerite? Or Margaret? Or Margarita? Pearl. And we recognize by that that it's a very valuable thing to possess. What is meant, then, by the merchant man who goes out seeking and finds the one pearl of great price, who sells all that he has in order to obtain the pearl?

Incidentally, I didn't mention this, but it's perfectly legal according to Jewish law for a man who stumbles over treasure in a field to go buy the field and possess it for himself. We might think today that was a little bit illegal, and the owner had been done out of his treasure. But that was perfectly legal according to the rabbinic law. If a person stumbled over something in a field, he didn't have to tell the owner it was there, because it might not be the owners, and he had a perfect right to go buy the field, and it belonged to him, legally. They've expressed themselves on that point.

But here is a merchant man seeking a pearl. What does this parable mean? Well, some have interpreted this as, the church is the pearl. Now the reason that the church is thought to be the pearl is because we have a great deal of interest in the church as we read through the New Testament. And furthermore, the pearl is a rather interesting jewel. The pearl is the answer of an injured life to that which injures it.

You know, a pearl is formed by a grain of sand, intruding itself into the shell of an oyster. And the oyster, in order to protect itself from that which injures its own life, makes the pearl. And there has been thought by many to be the Lord Jesus and his work on the cross, that his work on the cross is the answer of an injured life to that which has injured him. And the church is the product, then of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus.

Again, I cannot accept this interpretation. There are some lovely thoughts in it, and it’s certainly true that the Lord Jesus, in answer to the injury that we have done to him by rejecting him, has in the saving work of the cross wrought a mighty work of redemption by which we who have put him to death are saved. That’s all true.

But it’s not a very impressive picture of the Lord Jesus to see him wandering around the world, looking for the one pearl of great price. It’s just not a very good picture of the Lord Jesus, the sovereign Lord. As I’ve said, it’s doubtful that the church of the Lord Jesus is in this chapter at all. So I’m inclined again to say that to interpret this, we must understand these things.

The kingdom is the pearl. And the man is the believer who is awakened and is looking for the answer to that which the Holy Spirit has awakened in his heart. So if the kingdom is the pearl, and after all, he does say the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant man seeking fine pearls, then we can make these points.

The kingdom is the loveliest of all possessions. This man, incidentally, was a professional. He was a professional pearl hunter. He was a merchant man. He was a jeweler. He knew pearls. And he went around, according to this parable, looking for the finest of pearls. And with all of his professional knowledge, he finally set upon one pearl of great price, the Lord Jesus trying by that to stress the greatness and the loveliness of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. And notice it is one pearl of great price – one pearl, not many – one pearl of great price.

And I want to tell you it is a tremendous thing to be a believer in the Lord Jesus, related to the king, having been born again and therefore able to enter and see the kingdom of God as the Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus. So it is the loveliest of possessions.

Let me ask you a question. Are you sure that you shall enter that kingdom? Are you sure that you shall see that kingdom one day? Are you sure that you have obtained for yourself the one pearl of great price?

There's an old story about a Russian who knew pearls, who saw a magnificent pearl in the hands of a Russian and who did not really understand the value of it and who managed to acquire it. It was a pearl that was almost the size of an egg, and it was shaped like a pear. It was so beautiful and so valuable, that he Russian built a house in order to contain it, and in the house a special room in order to contain it. And then, in the room, a special table in which he took the pearl and put it in the table of marble. And it was constructed in such a way that it required a number of different keys to get to it, plus the knowledge of a special code.

And of course, from time to time he would show it to his friends because it was a remarkable pearl. It was so remarkable that the Tsar wanted to have it for himself, and offered the man many, many thousands of dollars for the pearl and honor and position in addition, but he refused.

Finally, he became implicated in a conspiracy and was forced out of Russia. He made his way to Paris. He left all of his possessions but the pearl, and he took the pearl with him to Paris. And there he set himself up in Paris, the one possession being his rich pearl. He came in contact with a British Duke, the Duke of Brunswick. And, when he came in contact with the Duke, the Duke was interested in the greatest and most beautiful of jewels, and so he invited him to come and take a look at his pearl.

And he was brought into the Russian man's home. And he went through all of the procedures to take a look at the pearl, and finally, when he unlocked the last latch that gave the view of the pearl, and looked down upon it, he was observed to turn suddenly pale. It almost seemed as if he had been stricken to death.

Unhappy man, his great pearl had suddenly or had become since he had last looked at it, clouded. And he knew enough about pearls to recognize that this often happened to pearls, and it wouldn't be long until that pearl that he prized so highly and was so valuable would be nothing but dust. Worthless.

What a sad picture of individuals who have spent their lives upon a pearl which is really worthless. You know, it is one of the saddest things to observe human nature, and to see human nature striving after goals that human beings have set up rather than the one goal of the possession of the relationship to the Lord Jesus.

Let me ask you another question. What’s your pearl? What’s your pearl of great price? Is it success in your business? Have you been so exercised to become a tremendous success in your business that your relationship to the Lord Jesus has suffered? Is it position for your family? Have you been so involved in gaining position for your family in the social world that your relationship to the Lord Jesus has suffered? Is it simply the pleasures of life? Are you so occupied in the pleasures of life, possessed in good health, not realizing that good health can flee in a moment? And have you so involved yourself in that that your relationship to the Lord Jesus is secondary?

The kingdom is the loveliest of possessions. There is no pearl like the relationship to the Lord Jesus. And I say to you young people, too, there is no possession like a relationship to Jesus Christ. There is no relationship that can compare to it. There is no pursuit of life that can compare with the pursuit of the relationship to Jesus Christ.

I think another thing that this parable teaches us is that entrance may come after a search. The Bible says there is none that seeketh after God, no not one, but the word of God also says, seek him while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. And we know that we harmonize these two apparently contradictory things by pointing out that when men seek God, it’s because he has worked first in their lives.

Think of the Ethiopian Eunuch. He was a man who was seeking by the grace of God. He was a religious man. He was a cultured man. He, incidentally, was a very wealthy man – a man of great position; he was a success. But there was something deep down within that was unsatisfactory. He had even been, apparently, attracted to the faith of Judaism, and he had come to Jerusalem at the time of the great feast in order to

worship, the Scriptures tell us. But there in Jerusalem, at the headquarters of the religion of the day, he had not found the satisfying relationship to the Lord Jesus.

He probably had heard some of the debates that Stephen and Paul had carried on in the synagogue, and had been amazed at how Stephen had been able to defeat the leaders of the Jews in the discussion of the Messianic promises, and he had become attracted to the study of those Scriptures, and so he had gone down to No. 8 Dan Street, where the Bible store was, and had bought a Scriptural text, a scroll of the Prophet Isaiah, written in Greek, evidently.

And on the way home in his chariot, he was reading it, and not making much sense out of it until Philip the Evangelist, moved by the Holy Spirit, came up alongside the chariot and asked him did he understand what he was reading. And he said, “I cannot understand this. I don’t have any teacher.” And Philip heard him reading it, Isaiah chapter 53, the greatest of the Messianic prophecies. He jumped up in the chariot and there began at that very point, the text of Luke in Acts says, “And preached unto him, Jesus.” And the man who had sought religion at the headquarters of religion found a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus. He had been seeking and seeking and seeking and had finally found the one pearl of great price.

I don’t mention Cornelius, the Philippian jailer, and others, but they illustrate the same thing.

This parable also illustrates the fact that the appropriation of the ministry of the Lord Jesus, the relationship to him involves great personal self-renunciation – selling all that we have. That means the selling off of the old prejudices that we often have, the prejudices that Christianity is just one of the many religions, and the reason we are Christians is because we are born in the United States. If we had been born somewhere else, we might be Hottentots, or Hindus, or whatever it may be. And all religions really teach the same thing. What a prejudice.

Or, perhaps you’re thinking about the prejudices that we have within our own country, such as, God ministers to us through the sacraments. He ministers to our salvation through baptism, through sitting at the Lord’s table, or perhaps through the other five sacraments, so-called.

Or, perhaps we have the prejudice of, well, I could never be blessed in a place like Believers Chapel, I understand they have Calvinistic doctrine over there and teach that salvation is altogether of the Lord. I’ve been born an Arminian, and I just must believe that I must have a little bit to do with my salvation. Let God have a great deal to do, and I’ll have a little bit to do. I cannot be blessed in a place like that.

Or perhaps it’s the self-renunciation of self-righteousness such as the rich young ruler, whose story we shall look at not too long from now. Who, after the Lord Jesus had pointed him to the commandment, said, “All these things have I kept from my youth”—I am righteous, what need do I have of a Savior?

Or the sinful pleasures. Or of the esteem of the world. All of these things are involved in the decision to respond to the Lord Jesus.

There was a monk one day, who was advancing rapidly in monkery [laughter]. And he was also moved upon by the Holy Spirit to seek a relationship with the Lord, and he sought it by means of the many ways by which he might, in his own flesh, do works of religion: by confession, by fastings, by penance, by all of the means by which the great Christian church organization had imposed upon its members to find the truth. Until finally, he was arrested by the Holy Spirit, and Martin Luther became the man who has preached to us the gospel of the grace of God in one of its purest forms.

The appropriation of the pearl of great price involves self-renunciation, but it’s wrought by God the Holy Spirit within us. We could never do it ourselves. Just like repentance is a gift, so is this a gift.

The last parable, I mention simply because it is very similar to the Parable of the Tares and the Wheat. But the stress is on the consummation of the age. Just as the first

parable in the sowing of the seed, in the Lord Jesus as the sower suggests the beginning of the age, so the dragnet in which all of the contents of the nets are dragged to the shore suggests the last of the age, and this series of parables moves from the advent of the age to the conclusion. And the stress rests upon the large net cast only once and hauled to shore only once, and the result is that the worldwide sweep of the present age, in the gathering out of the sons of the kingdom and sons of Satan is stressed.

And the Lord Jesus concludes by saying, “And the angels shall come forth and separate the wicked from among the righteous, and there shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.” The kingdom contains a mixture of Citizens, and the judgment concludes the age. And there is a necessity of moral purity, and by the way, the Lord Jesus lets us know that the post-millennialists are not really right after all. This age is going to end, and there is going to be the necessity of judgment therein.

Well, let me conclude just with a couple of statements. The age is to end in universal judgment, not universal salvation, as our liberal theologians would say. These parables stress the urgency of the purchase, and the immediacy of it; the joyousness of the purchase, the enriching character of the purchase, and the finality of that purchase.

Mr. Spurgeon, in one of his sermons, gives an illustration of something that happened, he said, in truth in Britain. There was an individual who put in one of the religious papers an advertisement, and he advertised for persons who had been losers by obedience to the divine command. And he said, that if any could prove that they had been losers by obeying the command to respond to the gospel of the Lord Jesus, that he would be happy if they would apply to him to make up all that they had lost by becoming followers of the Lord Jesus.

That advertisement appeared in the religious periodicals over a lengthy period of time, Mr. Spurgeon said, but the oddest thing is that nobody ever answered it. You might think somebody might try to obtain the money. He said, “I would have thought

somebody would have brought a case, but nobody did. They cannot make out such a case. There are no losers through Jesus Christ.”

But someone might say, what about the martyrs? Didn’t they lose? No, the martyrs didn’t lose. Why, the martyrs are in heaven right now, and you know what they’re saying? They’re praising God that they were granted the grace to give up their lives for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

So I say to you, again, the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God who offered his life a redemption for sinners. Have you recognized by the grace of God that you do not have everlasting life, that you are a sinner, that you are under divine condemnation, and that the Holy Spirit has awakened in your heart some desire to seek after him? The one pearl of great price is the Lord Jesus, and he may become yours through the simple trust in the work that he has accomplished.

May God the Holy Spirit lead you into the act of faith by which you turn from reliance in yourself, reliance in your own religion or your good works or whatever it may be, to reliance in the finished work of the Son who offered himself for sinners. May God, through the Holy Spirit, give you a true insight into the real value of human life. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Again, Father, we are so grateful to Thee for the privilege of the study of the word of God, and we thank Thee for the great truths that are contained within it.

We know, Lord that the kingdom of the heavens is a great treasure, the one pearl of great price, and we recognize that the teaching of the word of God is that we enter that kingdom through new birth.

And O Father, if there are some, yet, who have not come to faith in the Lord Jesus, and is saving word of redemption, give them no rest nor peace until they rest in Christ.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

“A Treasure, a Pearl, a Fisherman’s Net” by S. Lewis Johnson  
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