

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dear Fellow Redeemed, each of you pearls of great price sought out by our Lord.

You are precious. Each one of you is a blood-bought soul; one for whom Jesus Christ died.

Hopefully you know this already. And if you do, isn't it wonderful to hear that said again and again?

But if you have not heard that before, or realized it, know that it is a certainty.

In our text today, we will hear Jesus speak of **the kingdom of heaven** in 3 parables.

Each of these parables highlight a different aspect of **the kingdom of heaven**,

but they also share a common thread, that it is, at this time, not seen, but will one day be revealed.

Listen now and meditate on these 3 parables from the Gospel of St. Matthew, chapter 13, verses 44-50.

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

"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.^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

Let's begin with the 1st parable, the one about the hidden treasure.

Here Jesus tells of a man who found the treasure hidden in a field;

he finds it, covers it back up, and then buys the whole field just to attain that one treasure.

You can imagine the face of the man who sold the field as he sees the guy come

with all his possessions and makes the offer, "I want to buy your field for \$10M."

The field's owner looks at him in disbelief, knowing that the field's natural value is far, far less.

But what man will turn down that higher price, after all, what in his field could be so valuable?

Here is a good picture for us to consider about ourselves.

The Bible teaches that every single human life has intrinsic value.

We are not the effect of some universal random chance, but the product of a wise and loving Creator.

With the animals, God simply said, "**Let there be...**" and it was so. ^{Genesis 1:3}

But with man, God took counsel with Himself and said,

"Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." ^{Genesis 1:26}

Then He got His fingers dirty, and formed man from the dust

and breathed into us the breath of life, so that we became a living being.

You have value to God **for God made man in His own image.** ^{Genesis 8:6}

But as I mentioned, while each of these parables describes **the kingdom of heaven**,

each of them also has an unseen element to it as well that Jesus desires to reveal to us.

As we look out at humanity, as we listen or watch the news, we can see the effects of our own sin.

We see the ravages of selfishness, pride, arrogance, hatred, lust, greed, and so much more,

just tearing humanity apart.

We see wars and hear of rumors of war around the world, civil unrest here and abroad, mother's killing their unborn children, father's abandoning theirs, abuse, neglect, violence... It isn't just around the world or in other communities, its in our own homes.

Brothers and sisters fighting, children dishonoring and disobeying their parents, parents **provoking their children to anger,**

failing to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4

We treat each other like the dirt from which we came,

without consideration for the eternal soul that the Lord has given to each one of us.

Worldly scientists would tell us that we're simply animals, just more intellectually advanced.

God tells us that you are the crown of His creation, for whom this world was made.

He tells you that **you are fearfully and wonderfully made.** Psalms 139:14

You are to your Creator a fabulous treasure worth finding and paying a great deal for.

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Let's continue our meditation then with the third parable, the one about a net that catches fish.

In this parable we recognize that while all humanity has intrinsic value in God's eyes,

hidden, as St. Paul poetically describes us, **in these jars of clay,** 2 Corinthians 4:7

this parable teaches that there is a judgment that man will face on the last day.

As the net gathers a great deal of all kinds of fish, so the Gospel is spread over the entire world.

The Church continues to preach and to call people to our Savior,

to repent of our sins and to believe in His forgiveness purchased by Jesus' blood on the cross.

In the congregations of the Church throughout the world, there are those who truly believe in Christ, and, sadly, those who still cling to their sin, or disbelieve God's promise of salvation,

or desire to be their own saviors, endeavoring to earn their own place in heaven without Jesus.

While there are times when the sins of church members are obvious and they can be admonished, often times, our sins against the true faith are not seen or heard.

Our unchecked doubts and fears lead us into *misbelief, despair, and other shameful sin and vice.*

We may be able to fool our fellow man with our hypocrisy,

but Jesus warns us that at the judgment all will be revealed,

and the angels will separate the genuine believers from the false hypocrites.

Jesus spoke of the angels **separating the evil from the righteous.**

This is not a natural quality, as if God is judging between those He likes and those He doesn't.

Remember that the human race was made in His image and has natural value to Him.

Instead, the thing that separates the evil and the righteous is what they believe about Jesus.

Those that are judged **righteous** are not people who are merely good or moral, because hypocrites can be moral, too.

And, sadly, while we yet live on this earth, God's people will be plagued with temptations to sin, and do fall into sin, even grievous and dishonoring sins at times, for which they repent.

Instead, those that are declared righteous are those who cling to Jesus' perfection as their own, who cherish their baptism into Christ as a work which God has performed on them

to wash away their sins and save them, making them His children and heirs of His kingdom.

Those, on the other hand, who are declared **evil**, are those who reject Jesus as their Savior.

They refuse to believe that He has died for them,
or they are not sorry for their sins, or do not desire to give them up (or repent of them),
or they think that they are able to live a good enough life to earn a spot in heaven.
These, Jesus warns in our parable, will face an eternity in the fiery furnace, what we usually call hell.
He describes it as **a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth**.
In other words, the suffering there will be extreme and unending, of both the body and the soul,
separated from God's grace and goodness forever.

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Which is why the 2nd parable, about the Pearl of Great Price, is such an important parable in this series.
This parable highlights Jesus' love, not just for humanity, but specifically for you.

In this parable the **kingdom of heaven** is likened to a merchant in search of fine pearls.

Jesus is highlighting His desire and actions, He is the one seeking out the thing not yet seen.

The pearl itself doesn't do anything.

It simply exists.

It doesn't know how precious it is... how great its worth is.

But we get to find out.

The merchant is looking for fine pearls, this would indicate that he knows how to ascertain the value.
And so when he comes across this single pearl he considers it so unique, so precious and valuable
that He stops at nothing to acquire it.

While already having acquired many fine pearls and other valuables,

He chooses to deprive himself of all of them, so that he might obtain this single precious pearl.

That was a pretty steep price for just that one pearl, and yet, that is what Jesus thinks of you.

As the Son of God, He dwelt in paradise surrounded by the holy angels who perfectly do His will.
He had those fine pearls, and yet, He searches still more;

He found one worth leaving all that behind so that He might be the purchase price for that pearl.

You are that pearl.

For you, Jesus temporarily laid aside the full use of His divine powers and took the form of a servant.

For you, He united Himself to us, taking into His divine nature the same flesh and blood
and human soul as all humanity, as you.

For you, Jesus lived among dust and ashes, being treated shamefully by mortal men,
feeling the hatred and mocking and greed and envy of His own creation.

For you, Jesus took upon Himself your selfishness, hatred and murder, lust and adultery,
greed and idolatry, disobedience and dishonor, neglect and abuse, your misbelief and despair,

And for your sake [God] made Him... who knew no sin... to be sin,

so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21

Jesus is the merchant looking for you, His pearl of great price.

He has purchased you, *not with gold or silver,*

but with His holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death. 1 Peter 1:18 & Expl. To 2nd Article

He is not superficial, only looking on the surface for the beautiful or handsome,

for those whose lives are unmarred by immorality or manifest sins and offenses.

He is in search of what cannot be seen, a heart which clings to Him alone for salvation.

The Lord grant that this describes your heart, not just now, but on the day of judgement.

That just as your Savior has searched out for you and has fully paid the price to possess you,

that you reflect the Lord's love,
that you treasure His gift of forgiveness and grace and willingly spend all, even your whole life,
to acquire and keep it;
that you spread the net of the kingdom of heaven also over your children and grandchildren,
your parents and siblings,
that they too may be caught up in God's grace and be declared righteous,
and baptized heirs of the kingdom of heaven,
sought out, found, and purchased by our Savior Jesus Christ.

To Him alone be the glory. Amen.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria