

Sought, Bought, and Treasured

SERMON TEXT: Matt. 13:44-46

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Dearly beloved of God, our sermon text for this evening is taken from our Gospel reading. Let us pray...

Heavenly Father, we treasure Your Word for by it we know that we are treasured. By your Holy Spirit, You sought us and search us, revealing both Yourself to us, through Your Word, and ourselves to us, by Your Word, so that we might set our eyes, in faith, upon Him by whom alone can anyone come into Your holy presence. In the sending of Your Son, Jesus Christ, you have bought us and claimed us as Your own. Received as Your own treasured possession, may Your Word of promise in Christ Jesus come to possess us as we continue to receive it by faith. Amen.

Dearest brethren in Christ, the colour of the “lens” that you look through will colour how you see what is before you and what is all around you. In our English language there is an idiom that speaks of seeing the world through “rose-coloured glasses”. This idiom describes those who look at life through an optimistic “lens”, with their outlook intentionally set to see all things in a positive light. Of course, there are others who choose to see the world around them through the dark “lens” of pessimism. For them the world remains a dark place, a place without hope. Others claim to see things as they really are because they behold all things through the right “lens” of realism (or so they say). Indeed, one’s own worldview— that is, that set of beliefs which serve as the “lens” through which someone comes to interpret what they see in the world without and within— will colour what you take of what you behold. Well, behold, before

us this evening are two short parables from our Lord's own lips. Before us is a parabolic glimpse into what "the kingdom of heaven is like". Again, "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." Now, since the content and the consequences concerning these two parables will certainly be coloured by the "lens" through which you look at them, it is vitally important to keep them in the correct context. Yes, the context will determine the correct "lens" by which we can come to see what our Lord has revealed in the right light.

Text taken out of context is usually used as a proof-text for a pretext. This bears repeating and remembering: text taken out of context is usually used as a proof-text for a pretext. It is with exceedingly rare exception that these parables are presented properly and understood rightly, utilizing the correct "lens" given by the context. There is, you see, a pretext that we, as sinners, can't seem to readily escape. It is a pretext that finds itself embedded in the sinful nature of our fallen flesh and perverse psyche. It is the "lens" that colours how we see the Law. It is the "lens" that obscures our ability to rightly behold the Gospel. It is opposed to that alien righteousness that would secure our salvation as an act of God's grace alone. It sees ourselves as agents acting on our own to set things aright and secure our salvation through our own efforts of merit. It is the sinful nature's natural inclination to have us justify ourselves. The theological term for this "lens" is *Opinio Legis*, that is, "the opinion of the law". It is the "lens" that often colours how people perceive the two parables before us. The *Opinio Legis* is the pretext that pulls our text out of its context and, most grievously, is used against God's people as a proof-text

that only serves to rob them of their cause to rejoice as they find their rest in the Lord. So, what do these parables look like through the “lens” of the *Opinio Legis*? Let us take a look at them together in that terrible light.

There is an anonymous Swedish hymn entitled, O That Pearl of Great Price!, based upon the second of our two parables, which begins as follows:

O that Pearl of great price! have you found it?
 Is the Saviour supreme in your love?
 O consider it well, ere you answer,
 As you hope for a welcome above.
 Have you given up all for this Treasure?
 Have you counted past gains as but loss?

It ends with the following questions: “Before God, ere time’s favour shall cease, / Is the pearl of great price yours forever? / Have you Jesus, and in Him your peace?” The interpretation of the parable sets our Lord as the pearl. It takes the “kingdom of heaven” and sets it as being something to diligently seek and, once discovered, to even more diligently seek to acquire, at any price. Wrought in this type of setting, *you* must come to see yourself in the role of the merchant who gives up everything for the sake of such a treasure. Indeed, in the matter of treasure, such is also the case with the parable that precedes the one about such a pearl: *you* are the man who finds the treasure in the field and then gives up everything to acquire the field and thereby lay claim to the treasure that was hid therein. Yes, this is how the *Opinio Legis*, “the opinion of the law”, would have us look at these parables. The take-away point of the parables is that the kingdom of heaven is of far more value than anything that you may value; and therefore, you ought to be prepared to give up everything— all of your time, treasure, and talents— in the pursuit of gaining your place in the kingdom. Indeed, that is how both of these

parables are most often presented. The treasure and the pearl are representative of the kingdom and both the man and merchant represent those who seek after God. Surely, this does sound correct on some level, right? Yes, we ought to put God first and foremost, well above and over all things, right? So, what's so wrong with reading the parables in such a light, through this kind of "lens"? The problem, of course, is that it isn't true to the context; and therefore, it does not speak the truth that our Lord would have us hear, it does not show us what He would have us see. Furthermore, given this understanding gleaned from "the opinion of the law", you must constantly come to ask yourself, "Have I truly given *everything* for the sake of the kingdom?" Well, have you? All of your time, treasure, and talents? All of it all, every day in every way? You know, I know, and God most assuredly knows, that the answer is "No." Even if you somehow would or could give everything, there'd still be that lingering doubt that would follow the fearful thought that there was still *more* that you could've, would've, and, even more so, should've done. So, how does this make you feel? Is there any good news in such a mishandling of parables about the Gospel of the kingdom of heaven? I think you know the answer.

Dearest brothers and sisters in Christ, let us now look at these parables in their context and see what our Lord would show us about the kingdom of heaven, that is, what the reign of God is like. These two parables are found in St. Matthew's Gospel alone, amidst a series of parables that Jesus presents to the people who have gathered around Him. Alongside His presentation to the people, Jesus also provides explanations for a few of these parables to His disciples in private. In the case of each parable, the subject is "the kingdom of heaven". The subject of each opening sentence is "the kingdom of heaven". The similes the Lord employs are

describing “the kingdom of heaven”, that is, how God reigns and rules. So, we have to keep this in mind as we come to identify the proper points of comparison. In the first parable, we have a man, a field, and a hidden treasure that the man finds and then does everything in his power to properly acquire. The “field” is already identified for us because in two of the parables found in the greater context of the parables that we are considering— The Parable of the Sower and The Parable of the Weeds— the “field” is identified by Jesus as representing “the world” (and, although it is not as explicitly revealed, this would also most naturally be the case in regard to The Parable of the Mustard Seed). Yes, the “field” is “the world”. Bearing this in mind, as we look to identify what the treasure represents, the treasure is hidden in the field. The man goes to the field and therein finds that which he deems to be worth divesting himself of everything he has so as to acquire it. This, of course, is also the case with the merchant who finds what he is looking for and does whatever it takes to make it his own. Now, if all of the other parables have God as the prime actor, with the work of the Son of Man as the agent related to the subject of the simile— whether it be in The Parable of the Sower (wherein the Son of Man is the sower), or The Parable of the Weeds (wherein the Son of Man sows the good seed in his field), or The Parable of the Mustard Seed (wherein the seed is sown by a man into his field), or even The Parable of the Leaven (wherein a woman leavens the dough)— then why is it that we, more often than not, fail to rightly identify the “man” and the “merchant”? These two are the actors used to represent God’s action in the world that He so loves. So then, if the “man” in the first of our parables and the “merchant” in the second represent the Son of Man, what is the “treasure” and what is the “pearl”? At this time, I want you to answer. I want you to hear it for yourself and for you to hear yourself say it. Interpreting the parables through the

Opinio Legis, the “man” and “merchant” represents *you* while the “treasure” and “pearl” represent “the kingdom of heaven”. Within the context, with it as our “lens”, the “man” and the “merchant” is Christ Jesus; and therefore, that would make you... yes, you can say it! Say it! Say it aloud! Yes, *you* are the “treasure” and *you* are the “pearl”! Yes, it is Christ Jesus, our Lord, who gave up *everything*! He is the One of Whom it is written, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.” Yes, for, in the very words of our Lord, it is written, “For the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost,” and, elsewhere, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” It is He who sought us and bought us, for, as it is written, “You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.” Yes, God so loves *you* that He gave *everything* for you. Yes, because God gave His only Son to save you, you can trust that you are treasured. So, now how does this make you feel? Is there any comparison to the way that many would have us misread the message? In this light, we behold the Gospel! God is for you! Who can be against you? He moved heaven and earth for *you*. He spared no expense for *you*. He gave *everything* so that you can have *everything*— forgiveness, Life, and salvation! Having given everything, He withholds nothing.

Dearly beloved of God, seen through the right “lens” we see that these parables tell us that in Christ we are treasured. They show us what we should come to readily see because of both the immediate context and the greater context of God’s message to mankind. Concerning the Scriptures, Our Lord said that they bear witness about Him; and therefore, He is the right

“lens” by which we can rightly comprehend the kingdom of heaven. Indeed, these two parables can serve us as a litmus test by which we can discern the difference between the natural inclination to turn to the “opinion of the law” at the expense of the good news of God’s reign as the world’s Redeemer— foolishly looking, in futility, to justify ourselves— and the alien means by which the foolishness and scandal of the cross of God’s Christ serves to set us right in God’s sight. As we come to the conclusion of the Lenten season, with Holy Week set before us, we recall that because of Christ we are forgiven, we are different, we are clothed, we are ready, we are called, and we are treasured. Yes, beloved, *you* are forgiven, for the sake of Christ. You *are* different, filled with His Spirit, being conformed to His image. You *are* clothed in His righteousness and ready for His return. You are the ones called out of the darkness of this world; you *are* His Church. You have been sought and bought because you *are* treasured as His very own. In Jesus’ name: Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN.