

## **No Price Too Great**

SERMON TEXT: Matt. 13:44-46 (Rom. 8:28-39)

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*Dearly beloved of God, our sermon text for this morning is taken from our Gospel lesson. Let us pray...*

*Heavenly Father, we who have been called according to Your purpose, to be Your treasured possession, treasure Your Word, for by it we know that we are treasured. By your Holy Spirit, You have sought us and You search us. By Your Son, Jesus Christ, You have bought us and claimed us as Your own, justifying and glorifying us in Him from Whom nothing can separate us. Received as Your own treasured possession, on account of Your love for us, may Your Word of promise in Christ Jesus come to possess us as we continue to receive Your Word to us by faith. Amen.*

Dearest brethren in Christ, our Lord said to each and every person in the crowd that had gathered to hear Him speak: “He who has ears to hear, let them hear.” He told His disciples—and thereby tells us today, through them—that He spoke in parables so that, in fulfilment of God’s prophetic Word through the prophet, Isaiah, “though hearing, they do not hear or understand.” As for His disciples, our Lord said to them that they were blessed because “the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” were given to them, those who would truly hear what many longed to hear, but did not hear, and what many would not hear because they did not have the ears to hear such a Word of revelation. Indeed, we are truly blessed because, by God’s grace, we have come to hear His Word to us. We return to His Word. Yet, there is one who would whisper words—oh, so subtly—against God’s Word for us. He who fell from the heavens speaks to our fallen flesh, through this fallen world, to steal from us what God has

given us in His Word to us and to all who have the ears to hear. His desire is to colour how we see our God and ourselves through a light apart from that which reveals God's love for us. The Enemy desires to have us turn a deaf ear to what God has said and continues to say. He would assert "the opinion of the Law"— the *Opinio Legis*, as our theologians call it— over and above His sure Word. The Enemy would have us filter what we hear through just such a filter, in order to obfuscate the good news that God would have us hear. The *Opinio Legis*, the "opinion of the Law", is that voice which speaks to us from the depths of our fallen nature and perverse psyche. It seeks to convince us that we are called to be the agents of our own justification, that we are to act on our own to set things aright and secure our salvation through our own efforts of merit. It is opposed to that alien righteousness that would secure our salvation as an act of God's grace alone. It often talks over God's Word to the world. It seeks to turn our ear from the Gospel so as to silence it in our hearing by substituting its pretext in the place of the text which tells us what God would have us hear. The pretext that it sets before everyone of us is that text which is hailed as the best known verse of the Bible, even though it is not found anywhere in the Bible, namely, "God helps those who help themselves." Our soul's foe would have us listen to the *Opinio Legis*, the "opinion of the Law", insert itself into the Gospel text, which was just read aloud in your hearing, so as to pull it from its proper context and reset it into its own, in order to pull it from God's purpose. So, what is it that we often hear about what we have heard? What would the *Opinio Legis* have us hear? What would God have us hear? What is it that we are meant to hear?

Dearest brethren, let us, together, turn our attention to the first two parables that were read today: there is the parable of the treasure hidden in the field and there's the parable of the

pearl. 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.” There is also 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. Indeed, in our hymnals, we have the hymn entitled, Your Kingdom, O God, Is My Glorious Treasure, in which the opening stanza states, drawing its imagery from these two parables, “Your kingdom, O God, is my glorious treasure, my pearl of incomp’rable worth.” Now, it goes without saying, that we are indeed to

treasure our Lord above all—in fact, the First Commandment, as an expression of the greatest commandment that “[we] are to love the LORD [our] God with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul and with all [our] might,” presents this truth to us most vividly. However, this is not what our Lord would have us hear in these parables about the “kingdom of heaven”. No, rather that is what the Enemy, by means of the *Opinio Legis*, would have us hear. According to the *Opinio Legis*, “the opinion of the law”, 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 hearing the parables this way? The problem, of course, is that it isn’t true to the context; and therefore, it does not speak the greater truth that our Lord would have us hear, it does not tell us what He wants to tell us. 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.

Dearly beloved in the Lord, let us now hear these parables in their context and listen to what our Lord would tell 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”? Now, I ask this question quite often, every time that I speak of these parables to God’s people. So, at this time, I want you to hear yourself answer— I want you to hear it for yourself and for you to hear yourself say it! So, listen carefully before I ask you again. 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, however, the “man” and the “merchant” is Christ Jesus; and therefore, that would make you... ? Yes, 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. No price was too great. Yes, because God gave His only Son to save you, you can trust that you are treasured. No price was too great.

Dearly beloved of God, these parables tell us that in Christ we are treasured. 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. Concerning the Scriptures, Our Lord said that they bear witness about Him; and therefore, His Word speaks to us about what He has done for us, namely, what we could never do even in the attempt to help ourselves. God helps those who cannot help themselves— which, in regard to our justification, our salvation, ought to silence the “opinion of the Law” since before the Law we all stand accused and condemned! Yet, these two parables would tells us not to listen to our natural inclination toward the “opinion of the Law”, but rather they would have us give ear to the good news of God’s reign through the One who has given Himself to purchase our pardon, the Son of God who came as a man to make men into sons of God, conforming them in His image, “in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.” These two parables, in particular, tell of Him “who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all”. They do not speak to what we are to give up for the sake of the “kingdom of heaven”. They speak of what He has given. Yes, no price too great, that He would not pay. No price too great that He did not pay. Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear. In His name: Amen.

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