

On Treasures and Pearls

“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” (**Matthew 13:44-46**, ESV).

How many times have we heard these two parables? And usually we talk about them as if they teach the exact same thing. And they might. However, the contrast between what is said in these two statements leads me to believe they are not teaching the same truth. I'd like to share a different possibility. I don't want to be too dogmatic about this possibility, but want to submit it to you for your consideration.

My trouble with these parables began as I considered a difference in them. The first parable makes great sense to me. If I found a great treasure in a field that was worth more than I already had, I would gladly sell everything I had to purchase the field, because then I could live off the treasure. However, if I sold all I had and bought a pearl, I could admire its beauty, but I wouldn't be able to survive apart from selling it again for the value I purchased it for. Now, it is possible that Jesus was not intending us to think through the parable in this way and was just trying to illustrate the value of the kingdom itself. It is true that we can overthink parables and metaphors pushing them further than their teller intended. However, I think there might be a difference. Allow me to explain.

In the first parable, we are told that the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure. It is a valuable treasure. It is worth far more than what the man who finds it owns. It is so valuable he is willing to sell everything he already owns to get it. This is a story form of what Paul explains about his own life in **Philippians 3:7-11**. He counted all things as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ. He was willing to let go of everything he had to gain access to the treasure of knowing Jesus Christ. Though the world would think this is insane, it is actually a great deal. As Jesus says in **Matthew 16:25**, “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (ESV). By losing our lives, we can actually save them. When we no longer count our possessions, plans, pursuits, and pleasures as precious to ourselves, and instead lay hold of Jesus Christ, letting go of all other things, then we will find the salvation of our souls. As Jim Elliott said, “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Now, it is possible that the second parable is simply saying the exact same thing in another way. But I notice one big difference. In the first parable, the kingdom is like the treasure. However, in the second parable, the kingdom of heaven is not like the pearl; it is like the merchant in search of pearls. In other words, this second parable is not describing the kingdom of heaven as a valuable pearl, but rather the kingdom of heaven is in search of valuable pearls. What is any kingdom looking for? Citizens. The citizens are described as costly pearls. In other words, to get someone into the kingdom of heaven is costly. In fact, it cost heaven everything. It cost heaven Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (**John 3:16**, ESV). What did God pay to have citizens in His kingdom? He made the ultimate sacrifice. He paid His own Son. “Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ...” (**I Peter 1:18-19**, ESV). “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price” (**I Corinthians 6:19b-20a**, ESV).

What a powerful picture this second parable provides for us. It actually explains why the first parable is true. Why is the kingdom of heaven such a valuable treasure? Why would any of us willingly sell all to buy that treasure? Because the kingdom of heaven paid the ultimate price to purchase us. Because God loves us so much He was willing to give up all. God is not asking us to do for Him anything He wasn't willing to do for us. Further, it explains why anything less than sacrificing everything cheapens the value of the kingdom of heaven. Those who want to simply sell half of their possessions (metaphorically speaking) but think they can afford the field with the treasure are sadly mistaken. How dare we think we can shortchange this deal. God gave up all to let us be citizens. Let us understand the true value of that sacrifice and give up all to let Him be our King.

God has paid the price for His pearls. Will you pay the price for His treasure?

—Edwin L. Crozier