

Wednesday in Reminiscere
March 23, 2011

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Minneapolis, Minnesota

+ Jesu juva +

PARABLES OF LENT - THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE
MATTHEW 13:44-46, PSALM 49

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Tonight we continue our look at the parables of Jesus. And tonight we take up a pair of parables, which even taken together are among the shortest, the parable of the hidden treasure and of the pearl of great price. And once again we must be careful in our understanding of this parable, for all parables are a little tricky; and these two, while seemingly obvious in their meaning and application are no different. Remember, when one is asking what a parable means, one must pay close attention to the main point of comparison and in light of that comparison must ask what the varied elements of the story represent, if they represent anything.

In both parables today a person finds something of great value, sells all that he has and makes a purchase to acquire the thing. And what is the thing that is so desired? Well, this is a parable about the Kingdom of Heaven, after all; so that is the precious thing. Scholars and preachers have explained it in different ways, of course. Some say that the field in which the hidden treasure is found is the Scriptures (which may be purchased), but the treasure itself, which costs nothing, is the Gospel. Others have simply said the treasure is salvation and the field where ever it is found. The Pearl has been explained as being the wisdom of God, or justification, life with God, or Christ Himself! And all of these explanations, though seemingly at odds with the others, is true, for entrance into the Kingdom involves all of this and ends with the acquisition of Christ Himself and fellowship with the Father. Jesus, is as we sing so often, the Priceless Treasure of the soul.

And so we find many examples in the New Testament of people leaving everything behind and following Jesus, or after His resurrection, selling all that they had and giving it to the Church as a way of following Christ. These actions of sacrifice, of course, do not purchase anything from God. Salvation is His gift; the sacrifice of those who receive it the response of faith to that gift.

But it is an important response. Our Lord warns us that we cannot serve two masters, and so the sacrifice of every idol that threatens to take the place of God or of Christ must be put down and given up. This is one of the great themes of the fast, forsaking things - whether it be food, or alcoholic drink or something else altogether - in an effort to train the flesh and the soul away from the things of this world (even when they are ordinarily good things) and

toward the things of the Kingdom of Heaven. May the Lord grant us always to have our minds there.

Now while the similarity between the two parables is great, there is an important difference between them as well. In the first parable the man who finds the treasure simply stumbles across the thing. It was hidden in a field and he found it while plowing, or weeding, or just walking by, or what have you. He wasn't looking for this treasure, but there it is, and having found it he does all he can to acquire it. This is like those who just stumble on the Kingdom of God. They were not looking for Christ and His Salvation, and yet when they hear it, they receive it with joy and follow Jesus.

In the second parable, the merchant is one who is looking for pearls. Now what does this mean? It means that this person is actively seeking enlightenment, trying to discover truth, collecting wisdom, engaging in philosophy, debating things with others or at least within his own mind, searching for justice or righteousness, for God Himself, or perhaps just for meaning. And this one, finding at last the Gospel and the salvation of Christ, lay all of the other pearls aside and take up this one, little Pearl instead, recognizing in new found faith, that this is the One that is actually true and worthy.

And so the point of these two parables is that it does not matter how one comes to the Kingdom, what matters is that having found it, one lay hold of it in faith, giving up what one believed and had before, for the sake of this most precious treasure, which is Christ.

And so we have left everything behind to gain heaven, right? Ah if only we were that faithful. No one has given up everything. Even the greatest saints kept back a little of their old things or old ways. For who can completely conquer his past? Who can give up his or her flesh? Who has sacrificed everything for this kingdom? Even if you have given up much, you have not given up everything. And so the Christian life must continue to be one of sacrifice of self, of one's ways, of one's sins, of one's idolatries and rebellions, of one's flesh and old sinful nature, in repentance. And that always is the greater fast, as it were, of Lent and of life. The real denial of one's old desires and old flesh.

But there is one who has fulfilled this perfectly, who has sacrifice all for the sake of obtaining the Kingdom of Heaven, and that is Christ Jesus, who came down from Heaven to gain Heaven again, not for Himself, for it always was His, but for you. He took up the ultimate fasting in His Passion and in His death, laying down His life to gain Heaven for you. And having thus purchased it, He now gives it to you freely. Do not hesitate to receive it, leaving behind your old ways again, for this is His great desire for you, that you may have something far better than anything this world or this life has to offer, that you may possess the Kingdom of Heaven, and dwell with Him in it. Amen.

+ Soli Deo gloria +