

## THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Week #1 of the 4-Week Series, "The Parables of Jesus"

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Sunday, March 16, 2025

So, how many people would like something in your life to be better? To improve? To be happier or more prosperous? Anybody? You know, every single one of us is always seeking something better. We are always searching for something that will bring us more peace, more joy, more love, more happiness and success.

You know, Jesus was always teaching and preaching about how to make our lives better. And one of the ways that Jesus taught was through his parables. Jesus taught 43 parables, 13 of which began, "*The kingdom of heaven is like ...*" And today we begin a four-week series on the Parables of Jesus.

As we all know, a parable is a short, simple story that illustrates a spiritual lesson or a moral lesson. And it's often used to teach great spiritual truths in a relatable and easy-to-comprehend manner. The word "parable" in Greek actually means "comparison." And it's usually comparing something common and simple in every day -- like Jesus taught parables about seeds and fish, and coins, and vineyards. And it's presented in a way that the listener, in hearing this story about this common thing, gets an "*Aha! Oh, that's what you mean! That's what that's about!*"

And it is a powerful, powerful technique for teaching, because it helps us expand our own awareness and level of understanding. You know, parables are really psychological mechanisms for mental transformation.

You know, the disciples once asked Jesus, "*Why do you speak in parables?*" And Jesus said, "*I speak to them in parables, because they have ears, but do not hear. They have eyes, but do not see, nor do understand.*"

You know, sometimes we just don't get the truth. And sometimes when we just say it plain and simple, we still don't get the truth. But parables are a way to help us connect the dots to the truth that is inside of us. And the truth is within us.

Listen to the words from the book of Jeremiah 31. It says, "*I will put my law in their hearts and write it on their minds.*" In Hebrews it says, "*I will put my laws into their minds and write it on their hearts.*" It is in our hearts; it is in our minds. But parables help us get it. It helps us bring the truth that is within us to our awareness.

So today, we're going to look at the Parable of Great Price as it appears in Matthew 13, Verses 45- 46:

*"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all he had and bought it."*

Can you imagine finding something so valuable, worth so much that it would take your life to another level, that you would sell everything you had to attain it? I mean, could you imagine something that would make such a difference in your life? And make your life so much better that you would change yourself and your life to accommodate this thing?

Now, this merchant may have traveled far and wide to find this pearl of great price, seeking and searching to discover it. And realizing, eventually, that this pearl of great price was not something physical; that it is something that is within ourselves. The greatest, most valuable, powerful thing in our lives -- to change and improve our lives -- is the kingdom of God, which Jesus said in Luke 17:21, "*is within you.*"

And so, the moment we realize that, we are aware that we have full access to the fullness and the goodness and the allness of God. That we have access to the Power that created each of us in its image and likeness, and is the Source of all good and the Source that makes all things possible.

The pearl of great price is the awareness that the Spirit of God's peace is within you; that the Spirit of God's love and joy and wisdom and healing and understanding and creativity and possibilities and abundance is already within you.

So, what we're going to look at are the three main lessons and points in this parable to teach us how to acquire the pearl of great price.

And the first thing is **WE'VE GOT TO LEARN FROM THE MERCHANT**. The merchant is someone who buys and sells for profit, that is seeking fine pearls: pearls of greater value. That's his business, That's his desire. And so, merchants -- by their very nature -- are driven. They are focused. They are intentional, and they are committed to pursuing that which is valuable and the most important.

This merchant wasn't just gathering pearls. He was gathering and seeking finer and better pearls, and the pearl of the greatest value. He wanted to live life and live it more abundantly, and realized that an abundant life isn't just about quantity. It is about quality. **He was seeking to find something that would enrich his life; that would bring greater meaning and fulfillment and greater levels of joy.**

And the truth is that we are all merchants; that we are all the head of our own business. That we are all seeking something of greater value; all on a quest for something greater and better, of a higher quality. And so, besides knowing that every one of us is seeking some greater and higher quality, something else that the merchant did was **he was able to discern and recognize the value of the pearl through his knowledge, through his experience, through his understanding and desire.** His expertise helped him gain a level in ability to tell something that was good from not good. Something that was superior from inferior. Something was lesser from greater.

And that level of discernment is needed in all business. Tailors have to know how to discern good quality cloth from inferior. Butchers need to know how to discern from higher qualities of meats. Business people have to discern the -- or developers -- the higher level of value of certain lands.

And so, to be able to discern quality is an important attribute that we all have to have in our lives. To be able to evaluate and make decisions and decide what we want and what is the value of it. Again, we are the merchants of our own lives.

And so, my question is: How well are you running your business? And what is it that you're actually seeking? What is the thing that will bring your life greater quality? And what do you value most? And how well are you from discerning what is good and not good for you? What is for your best, and what is not for your best.

And so, my question: How many people ever made a bad decision? Anybody every make a bad decision? How many people ever overvalued or undervalued something or some person in your life? Anybody ever do that?

You know, merchants are constantly seeking something greater and better, like all of us. And merchants also are working on discerning what is for their higher value. You know, what we should buy and what we should sell. What is something that will make a positive difference in my life, and things that won't? Because merchants are in it for a profit. They want to make their lives better. They're not in it to just break even or to lose.

And so, our discernment in our own lives of what are we seeking -- and how well are we discerning the decisions of who we let in and what we do and how we do it -- absolutely makes a huge difference.

The other aspect of a merchant that is an important lesson for us is that **merchants have to do the work**. Just wanting the pearl of great price doesn't -- Shazam! -- get it right; it just suddenly appears. There is work that needs to be done to achieve and acquire it. And same with the pearl of price -- or the kingdom within us or the Christ consciousness. It takes work. We have to do the inner work needed: work to change and transform our consciousness, our thoughts, and our mindsets.

You know, **it takes work to know the difference between the lesser and the greater**.

And so, what do we need to sell? We need to sell our false beliefs, our negative thoughts. We need to sell and give up our attachments. You remember the rich young man? He was told by Jesus to go and sell everything. And he walked away sad, because he had a lot of possessions. And the thing he didn't realize is: his possessions possessed him. He didn't possess his possessions; they possessed him.

And sometimes we need to let go of the things that we are so attached to. And sometimes we need to let go of our unhealthy self-image. We need to let go of our feelings of a lack of self-worth, or lack of limitation, or resentment, or blame. I mean, everything that we are holding on to that is not for our highest good -- not in alignment with the kingdom -- we need to sell it. We need to release it.

And notice in this story: **you've got to sell first before you can** buy. That you've got to get rid of and release all the energy that we have pent up in all kinds of negative beliefs and thoughts. Because we want to exchange it -- or sell it -- and buy something of higher value. We want to buy something greater and buy something better.

So, what do we learn from the merchant? That you are in charge, that you're the merchant of your own business. That what you are seeking: you are seeking a better life of higher value, and you must be able to improve your ability to discern what things have the highest level and value and the things that you want and don't want.

The second thing this parable teaches us is to **LEARN WHAT TO SELL**.

Ervin Seale in his book, *Live and Learn*, says, "*The greatest need to sell is the belief that outside sources are the cause and the thing to blame for the conditions of our lives and our experience.*" That our own unhappiness or frustration or experiences of our lack are not someone else's fault.

Sometimes we think, "*Oh, it's my ex that's causing all the problems.*" [Congregants laugh] You know, "*It's my boss; it's my parents; it's my kids; it's the economy; it's the government; it's the weather; it's the Phoenix Suns this year.*" [Congregants laugh]

You know, we have all of these things, and somebody else is doing it. Here's Ervin Seale again. He says, "*This belief is the cause of all resentments and hate and anxiety, and even depression. Believing and blaming that outside things are the cause of my unhappiness is the thing that causes us more pain than we realize.*"

He says the belief that another can be your enemy; the belief that you are the football of chance; the belief that you must struggle and fight and oppose power and conditions outside of yourself are all false beliefs and not in alignment with the kingdom of heaven.

I ask you: Is there anyone in your life that you are holding outside of your heart right now? Anyone that you have resentment or bitterness or blame towards? Is there anyone you believe in your life is literally taking your good away or blocking your good? These are the things we need to sell. **These are the things we cannot hold on to if we want to buy the pearl of great price; if we want to experience the kingdom of heaven.**

The fact is: we are all, every single day of our lives, engaged in the practice of buying and selling or accepting and rejecting ideas and comments and thoughts and beliefs.

You ever had somebody say something and it's like ... and it just clicks? You may as well just say, "I'll buy that." Or you ever had somebody say, "You know, I got this thing for you. You can make lots of money and you don't have to do a thing"? You're thinking, "I am selling that one." [Congregants laugh]

Every day in our lives, whether we realize it or not, we are buying and selling thoughts and ideas and concepts and beliefs. And we just need to be aware of them. We are in a process of looking at what are the unhealthy limiting beliefs and ideas that we are holding ... you know, like, "I'm not good enough." Like, "Things never work out for me." You know, "There just isn't enough time; there's not enough money; there's not enough love. There's not enough!" You know, "People are just mean, and they're just selfish and totally out for themselves."

And to all those I say, "Sell, sell, sell, sell!" [Congregants laugh]

And so, it's important that we realize we're in this for profit so we want to **sell things that pull us down so that we can elevate our consciousness and our awareness of the richness of the kingdom of heaven right here and now.**

Thinking, "I don't have enough" and "I'm not enough" is not basking in the richness of the kingdom that is within us. So, my question for you is: What false beliefs and limiting mindset do you need to sell and get rid of to experience the kingdom of heaven? What fears and worries is it time for you to sell so you can buy the pearl of great price?

I'll bet every single one of us, in some way, is holding on to something we know we should let go of. What limiting belief about yourself and your self-worth are you holding on to? You know, the fact is: every single one of us needs to release the lesser to accept and open ourselves to the greater. So lessons from the merchant: learning what to sell.

And then the last one is: **WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU BUY.** "The kingdom of God is within you." are you willing to buy that? "Christ in you is your hope of glory." Are you willing to buy that?

You ever hear that expression, "to get a good purchase"? And it means to get a good grip on something that's heavy or slippery. And the fact is: we need to have a good grip -- a good purchase -- on the awareness of the kingdom of God within us; on the pearl of great price.

And here are three things we could do that, once we buy and accept that the kingdom of God is within us -- when we buy this invaluable pearl of great price -- we have to do three things.

Number one is: to **pray daily.** To connect with this Power -- this thing of inestimable value -- and spend time in Its awareness; immersing our hearts and minds in the awareness of the kingdom of heaven within us.

C.S. Lewis said, "I pray because I can't help myself." He feels compelled to pray. He feels compelled to have his soul connect with the Source of all life. Could you imagine being that compelled to connect with Spirit? to pray and meditate and immerse your heart and mind in the awareness of the living Spirit of God? Jesus did it multiple times a day. He was compelled to pray; compelled to connect.

The Book of Matthew said, "Seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." Make it a priority to pray, to connect. Again, to immerse your mind in the Mind of God. Psalm 37 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart." Philippians says, "Rejoice in the Lord always."

Are you willing? I want you to buy this awareness of the kingdom of God in you! To spend time immersed, delighting yourself, rejoicing yourself, and seeking that consciousness and presence as a priority.

Second thing is to **live your life from the inside out**. And this is to realize that the power is within you. So that, whatever is going on in your life, don't blame; look within. Think of a situation right now in your life that isn't going as well as you'd like. And here's how we handle it. We need to say: What am I supposed to do to bring more peace to this situation? Or love? Or more joy? What am I supposed to bring and allow to come through me to help bring healing to this relationship? To bring up a level of understanding or awareness?

That, whatever situation in your life is, the first thing we need to do is live from the inside out. To know: What do I need to bring; what light do I need to bring to this situation? What love, what understanding, what compassion, what level of positivity do I need to bring to whatever situation is going on in your life?

Make a commitment to live your life from the inside out. Remember, you sold blame. You sold resentment. So now we need to own the power and own the spirit and to live our lives from the inside out. Don't look without ourselves. Look within.

And then the last one -- what to do when we buy this pearl of great price -- is to **let your light shine**. To know every single day: there is a light in you that shines, and you will want to allow it to shine as brightly and brilliantly as possible. And something as simple as letting it shine through a smile. Let it smile through a kind word, or a nice deed or gesture. It doesn't have to be huge, but it has to be sincere, and it has to be consistent and born out of a mindset of living each day with joy, gratitude, and enthusiasm.

Rumi said, *"Don't be satisfied with stories, how things have gone with others. Unfold your own myth."* Anybody read the book, *The Alchemist*? I love the line that says, *"We must live our personal legend."* The greatest thing you could do for the world is let your light shine. Bring forth your personal legend. Whatever the good or great thing that is in you -- the gift that God brought you here -- make it shine. Express it. Embody it.

A woman was walking along a beach and stumbled upon a genie's lamp. She picked it up and rubbed it and, lo and behold, the genie appeared. The woman was so amazed and she remembered you're supposed to get three wishes. So she said, *"Do I get three wishes?"*

And the genie says, *"Nope. Due to inflation, constant downsizing, fierce global competition and low wages in the Third World countries, I can only grant you one wish. So what shall it be?"*

And the woman didn't hesitate. She said, *"I want peace in the Middle East. See this map? I want these countries to stop fighting with each other and live in peace."*

The genie looked at the map and explained, *"God, lady, these countries have been at war for thousands of years. I am out of shape after being in this bottle for centuries. I'm good, but I'm not that good. I don't think it can be done. Make another wish."*

And the woman thinks for a few minutes, then says, *"Well, I've never been able to find the right and perfect man for myself. One that's considerate; one that listens well; that's funny and faithful; who likes to cook and helps clean the house; and is good in bed; and gets along well with my family; and doesn't watch sports all the time; and likes to share his feeling. That's what I wish for: my right and perfect man."*

And the genie sighed and said, *"Can I see that map again?"* [Congregants laugh]

The kingdom of God within you is kind of like the genie that has the power to grant our wishes. You know what I find interesting? Pearls – the pearl of great price ... the way that pearls are formed, everybody knows: a little bit of sand gets into the oyster and it irritates it. And it secretes a certain substance that protects around it and eventually turns it into something beautiful and something valuable ... and even priceless.

And that's what the kingdom of God within us is really about. That, regardless of what we think we've lost or where we're hurt -- no matter how bleak life seems -- we can turn within and the Kingdom of God within us will transform what was an irritant into beauty and value in our lives.

This is a powerful, powerful parable. It reminds us of the truth that you are the merchant: you're the one in charge of your life. Ask yourself: what are you seeking of greater value to improve your life? And are you willing to keep improving your discernment, to know what is of higher or lesser value? And then to do the work, which is to sell and then buy. And to sell all the lack, all the limitations, all the lesser thoughts to create space for something greater. And then, once you buy the pearl of great price – once you purchase it -- to have daily connection with that incredible power in you; to live from the inside out; and to let your light shine.

To know that the kingdom of God is within you and the willingness to do the work -- to buy and sell and own and use it: that is the lesson from the pearl of great price.

God bless you all. [Congregants applaud]