

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IS FORGIVENESS

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Rev. S. D. Spencer - Pastor

Matthew 13:44-52

Today our parables from Matthew 13 may seem like a hodgepodge of stories, but this isn't the case. Our Lord is at work to teach us much about His Church and its mission from now until the Last Day. Let's examine these parables in order.

I. THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND THE PEARL

We examine these two together. ***“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 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 that he had and bought it”*** (Matt. 13:44-45).

Both are of a similar theme: Each one has something precious that a man redeems by giving up all that he has. At the same time, there's an important difference: The pearl is on display for all to see, while the treasure in the field is hidden.

At the time of Jesus there were no local bank branches so people hid their money. One option was to bury it in the field where only the owner knew where it was. Sometimes, the owners died or just forgot where he had buried the treasure. The law of the land stipulated that if someone found a treasure in a field, they couldn't just simply pick it up and walk away. They could, however, cover up the treasure, go to the owner of the land and offer to buy the field. If the owner knew about the treasure, he could refuse to sell or go get the treasure before he sold. The point of the law was this: In order to get the treasure, the buyer had to redeem the whole field.

This teaches us something important about our Savior. In order to save believers, Jesus died for the sins of the whole world. He has redeemed the whole world by His death on the cross, suffering God's judgment for the sins of believers and unbelievers alike. ***“So that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life”*** (John 3:16).

In both of these parables, Jesus is the One who is giving all to get the treasure. Sometimes these parables are preached as if Jesus is the treasure and pearl, and that we make Him our Savior by giving all for Him. After all, He is a priceless treasure; but do we have anything of great enough value that can purchase salvation? We are sinful, and even our righteous works are nothing but filthy rags. On the other hand, the Scriptures declare that Jesus gave up all in order to redeem the world. He wins salvation by His holy, precious blood, and by His bitter suffering and death. It is Jesus who gives all to redeem the world, that He might ransom the treasure which is you.

You are the pearl of great price, for the treasure of these parables is the Church, the very people of God. Despite your sin and your guilt, God the Father cherishes you so much that He has paid the price for your salvation, the death of His own Son. You were dead in your trespasses and sins, so the Son of God came to this field and unearthed you from that death. He washed you clean in your Baptism; He continues to polish and preserve you by His Word and Sacrament. He has given all at the cross to redeem you, for you are His treasure.

But why does our Lord use two parables to make this point? Let's go back to the distinction between the two: The pearl is on display for all to see, while the treasure is hidden in the field. It serves to show us that the Church is both visible and invisible. You can tell that there is a Church on earth because there are visible signs. There are church buildings, TV programs, Christian bookstores and all sorts of Christian mission groups. It is obvious to the world that the Church exists, just as the pearl is obvious to all as it is on display.

But, the Church is also hidden: Christians are saved by faith, and faith cannot be seen. Therefore, the true Church is those who are the people of God. It cannot be discerned by man. We don't stand on a street corner and look at a crowd and say, "I can see that that one is a believer and

that one is not." There are no secret 3-D tattoos that only Christians can see. As a matter of fact in some parts of the world where Christianity is prohibited by law, there are no church buildings or public displays at all. Christian's worship in secret. In contrast, there are many organizations that claim to bring Christ to the nations, yet they may not preach the Gospel and are simply social organizations. In such a case, it looks visibly like the Church, or some Christian organization but it is not.

These two parables announce a great truth. At certain places the Church's presence will be obvious to all but also, in some places the Church will be hidden, driven underground and known only by faith. It really doesn't matter: The Lord knows His people; He knows all things, the visible and the invisible. Regardless He is the one who has given all to redeem His people. And He will not forsake His Church, His treasure, after paying such a great price to redeem her.

The Lord knows and remains faithful to His people for as long as this world lasts. But this world will not last forever: Judgment Day is coming. That is the topic of the next parable, the dragnet.

II. THE DRAGNET

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

It's easy explain a parable when the Lord provides the explanation. The dragnet represents the final judgment, and it is chosen with care. A dragnet isn't discriminating; it catches everything in its path and leaves nothing behind. Afterwards all the fish are sorted.

This portrays the Last Day, when the Son of Man returns with the holy angels. There will be judgment of all. The righteous will be delivered to heaven, and the unrighteous will be sentenced to eternal condemnation. This is the Word of the Lord, and this parable is supported by all of the Scriptures.

Many object to this doctrine of judgment and hell, and others will use it as an excuse to deny the Savior. "Oh it's so unfair, how could a loving God let so many to perish, tossing them away like bad fish?" The question sounds valid, but it is terribly ignorant. So we respond with the Scriptures.

First, remember the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl. All of us, by nature, are unredeemed. All of us by nature are lost and condemned in our sin. God is not to blame for this. One might just as well blame a doctor for disease or farmer for famine. By nature, we are all destined for destruction. The world counters, "If God is God, then why doesn't He do something about it?" The answer is, of course, He has. The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl both tell us that He has given all to redeem the whole world. He has given His Son to suffer-He has judged His Son for the sins of the entire world! At the cross, the Lord has won forgiveness so that no one needs to perish.

"Again the world retorts, "How come so many are condemned? This loving Jesus of yours certainly seems to be a merciless 'hanging judge.'" This shows the blindness of sin. Jesus isn't a hanging judge who desires the death of the wicked; He is the Judge who has been hanged on the cross for the sins of the entire world. He has given His life and shed His blood for all people, so that He need not judge them. Talk about mercy! How many judges offer to suffer execution in order to set free the guilty?

The world is still not satisfied, and rails back, "If He's died to redeem the world, how come He doesn't just save everybody?" The answer is that the Lord does not force people to believe in Him; they can cling to their false beliefs and killing sinfulness if they prefer. He offers love and forgiveness, mercy and salvation to all; but He coerces no one to be saved. Therefore, unbelievers are not condemned because the Lord is not merciful; they are condemned because they reject His mercy. This Judge, whom the unbelievers reject, has died to redeem them. What more can He (†) do?

So, the parable of the dragnet gives solemn warning and cause for great joy. The warning is that those who do not believe in Jesus will be condemned on the Last Day. The cause for great joy is that believers, the Lord's precious treasure, will be gathered and kept in the kingdom of God forever.

So, what does this have to do with you and me today, prior to the Day of Judgment? There's one more parable to go.

III. THE PARABLE OF THE HOUSEHOLDER

Jesus said to them, ***"Have you understood all these things? They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old."***

Jesus is speaking to His disciples alone, and He is preparing them to be His apostles. Throughout the parables of Matthew 13, He has taught them about the kingdom of heaven. He has taught them about the Gospel. He has taught them about missions. Do they understand what He has taught? Yes, and it's vitally important that they do so. Why? Because He will send them to teach, they are entrusted with the preservation and proclamation of His Word. They are to care for His house-His Church. They are to proclaim His treasure of salvation. They will declare that Christ is the Savior, testified to in all of Scriptures and declare Him to be the Redeemer of the world.

The disciples are householders, not homeowners. They do not own the treasure; they manage the treasure that belongs to the Lord of the house. They manage His treasure, not their own. They proclaim His Word, not their own. If they change the message, they have departed from household of Christ.

We continue in that same One, Holy Christian and Apostolic Church; in other words, we proclaim the same message as those apostles did. As pastors properly preach the Word and administer the Sacraments; Christians then receive the forgiveness that Christ has won, and then go out and help their neighbor. They help their neighbor by their vocations, and by helping them when in need. They help their neighbor by telling them about Jesus as the opportunities arise. They help their neighbor with their offerings at church, so that the public proclamation of the Word can continue.

And it's this public proclamation of the Word, the message of sin and grace, of Christ and the cross, this is the treasure we are given and are to give. If we fail to proclaim Christ and Christ alone, then we are no longer doing our Lord's will. Therefore, week after week, we declare the forgiveness of sins; and, of course, this means that we must talk about the sins that need to be forgiven.

The world doesn't like to hear about sin and salvation. We do not warn of sin in order to condemn; we warn of sin so that people can be saved from damnation. That's the job of the Church, according to the parable of the householder: To proclaim the precious message of the Lord's salvation.

We remain faithful to the message of the Lord of the Church-that He alone and He only is the Savior who has died to redeem the world. . There is one Savior who has redeemed the world; all other gods are false. We proclaim the only one who has given all to save His people.

As we conclude, please note that all of these parables have a common theme: Missions. Evangelism-the giving of the forgiveness of sins. The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl declare Christ's redemption of the world by His death on the cross, and His faithfulness to His people. The parable of the dragnet teaches that all who believe will be saved from judgment by the forgiveness Jesus has won for them. And the parable of the householder tells us the message that we proclaim: The message of the crucified and risen Savior who gives you forgiveness.

This is the same message you now receive, for in Christ Jesus, you are forgiven all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit for Jesus sake and in Jesus name, Amen and Amen.

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