

## SERMON FOR SUNDAY, JULY 26 AND WED., JULY 29, 2020

Pent 8A Matt 13:44-52 “A Sure and Joyous Hope”

Dear fellow redeemed, For the past two weeks, we’ve been considering Jesus’ parables in Matthew chapter 13, we’ve seen that our Lord’s message has been that as long as the Church is in the world, God’s Word and God’s people will come under attack.

That is why the church on earth is called the Church **Militant** – a Church not at peace and rest, but a Church in a constant battle against the Enemy, who is seeking to destroy God’s Word, His people and God’s Church by whatever means possible.

At times it seems as if the Enemy is winning the war for the souls of humanity. As we get worn down by the battle and the relentless attacks, even the *strongest* of Christians can be begin to wonder, “***What hope do we then have?***”

With that question in mind, we turn to the concluding parables in Matthew 13, to strengthen our faith and show us once again our hope.

Today, Jesus tells two similar parables, called the Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Parable of the Pearl of Great Value.

In both parables, a man finds something that He considers to be of greater worth than anything else in this world, and sells “**all that he has**” to buy these things.

Now, unlike the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds, Jesus does not supply an explanation of these two parables. Instead He asks His disciples, “**Have you understood all these things?**” And while they answer “**yes**” . . . you have to wonder! Did they? Really?

Do we? Because most often these parables are interpreted as Law – that the Kingdom of Heaven should be of such value to you that you’d be willing to sell – “**all that you have**” to get it.

But is that really the point that Jesus is making here? If so, then not only do we live and struggle in the Church Militant, but we have also all miserably failed in our devotion to God’s Kingdom as well.

For we must admit that there are many times when God’s Kingdom is not first in our hearts and minds. We must admit that there are many things and people that often occupy our hearts and minds in place of God and His kingdom.

And if Jesus’ final message in this set of parables is about what our devotion *should* be like, then we had all better do a better job of fighting in the Kingdom and putting God first!

But don’t we already know that? Isn’t that the First Commandment? The Catechism explains it’s meaning saying, “***We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.***”

Is Jesus *really* telling these parables to motivate us to be better Christians? In other words, are they words of Law?

Well, the answer is no! For just as in the previous week's parables, they are told to offer us good news and hope.

For these parables are not about us; we aren't the actors, rather they are about what Jesus and what He has done for us. His actions on our behalf are the basis of our hope.

Jesus is the man who found a treasure and a pearl of such great value that He was not only willing, but in fact, did give up everything He had to make this treasure become His own.

He came down from Heaven and became one of us, with one difference, he was without sin. He gave up some of His rights as God, willingly not using His divine power at all times.

He left His throne room and the unending songs of the angels to be born in a stable. He became obedient to His parents, and lived in the creation He Himself had made.

He knew hunger and thirst and sorrow. He was subjected to temptation. He knew rejection, even in His hometown, even by His beloved covenant people, Israel.

The all-powerful One allowed Himself to be arrested and man-handled – whipped, spit on, and mocked. He did not fight back as His hands and feet were nailed to the cross.

His head was crowned with thorns. He experienced the utter rejection of God, and then tasted death and the grave.

He exchanged His perfection for our sin, His place for our place, His life for our death. Or in other words, He truly and fully gave up everything for us, His treasure.

With single-minded devotion and steadfast purpose, with a heart and love we cannot completely understand, Jesus bought His treasure and pearl.

Paid for in full **“not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.”** ***And so, you are not your own; you belong to Him!***

That's right! You are not the man in these parables, ***you are the treasure!*** That's why I have repeatedly told you for some three years now; that you are ***“a unique and unrepeatabe miracle of God's creation whom he loved enough to die for.”***

The Son of God considered you to be of such great value that He was willing to give up *everything* in order to purchase you. To have you for His own. . . .

Now, you may not have ever thought of yourself that way before; that's why I keep repeating that phrase to you. You are a valuable treasure or a pearl of great value, the Apple of God's eye, that is how God looks at you.

God is your Heavenly Father, who sent His Son to pay the price, and the Son sent His Spirit to live in you and bring you to Him, so that He could take you to your Father. . . . And that is the hope that we have.

It's our hope as we struggle in the Church Militant, as we are attacked daily and relentlessly by Satan, as we fall into sin and fail to do those things we know we should, and do those things that we know we shouldn't, that still we are precious to God.

That God still wants us as His own. That Jesus' death, resurrection, and forgiveness are always for us. Jesus paid the price, and we belong to Him! **PAUSE**

Now, an unbelieving world has trouble with this Gospel message I'm proclaiming to you this morning. It's scandalous to human intellect because it turns everything upside down!

For in our world today, it is not the greater who serve the lesser, but the lesser who serve the greater! And so, in the military you have the chain of command. In business, it is the CEO's who get the perks and bonuses, not the lowly workers.

And so, according to the world's thinking, since He is the Creator and we are the lowly creatures, we must serve Him. It is we who should give up everything for Him!

But as the scriptures say, **"My way is not your way and my thoughts are not your thoughts...as far as the heavens are above the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts."**

Thus, it is natural that the Gospel is not like the world, and so the Son of God did indeed come, **"not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."**

And while even we who have the Spirit, may not be able to fully comprehend this Gospel truth, it is the basis for the joyous hope and confidence that we Christians have; That the Creator would lay down His life for sinful creatures like us!

And this upside-down work of God is still continuing today. For while the life and death and resurrection of Jesus are an accomplished historical fact, the fruits and benefits of His life, death, and resurrection are still being given to us today.

Jesus is still present in His Church, serving His own with His gifts. And so, while the hand of the Pastor baptizes, it is Jesus raising another sinner to a new life in Him.

While it is the voice of the Pastor saying, **"I forgive you all your sin,"** He is standing **"in the stead and by the command"** of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is giving the full and free forgiveness He won on the cross.

While it is the Pastor who speaks the Words of Christ over bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, it is Jesus Himself who serving you at His table. Jesus is both your host and your food, feeding your hungry soul His very life-giving body and blood, serving you at His Table.

And having been served and refreshed and fed and blessed and forgiven, we live to fight another day in the Church Militant, battling against the devil, the world, and our sinful nature.

But we **“live and move and have our being”** in the Son of God who has promised to be with us. In the Son of God who came and gave up everything for us.

In the Son of God, who has won the battle over Satan, death, and the grave, and has promised that He will one day take us out of the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant in Heaven.

And that is what we heard will happen on the last day, in the last of Jesus' parables in this chapter. Jesus said, **“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind...at the close of the age, the angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace.”**

Or in other words, God knows His own. And those who by faith in Jesus Christ have been declared righteous by His blood will be separated for the Church Triumphant.

Treasures and Pearls are not thrown into the fiery furnace, but are given mansions in heaven.

And so even though now, for a little while, we must endure much hardship and struggle, at the same time we do have hope and confidence through our Savior Jesus Christ. In ourselves, we have no hope. But in Christ, we have every hope and confidence. For as we heard from St. Paul,

**“. . . we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”**

Please note that in those verses there is not even a hint of uncertainty, no wavering, no doubt. And note that all the actions describing us are past tense. In Christ, we have been called, we have been justified, we have been glorified.

Your salvation is a done deal; we're just waiting for our present reality to become an eternal one when Christ returns.

In Christ, the world, sin and death and grave can harm us none, because these He has already overcome the world for us.

Thus, in Christ. we have the joyous, certain hope of eternal life in Heaven.

For now, we feebly struggle, but like the saints already in heaven, we know that **“Our Lord is our captain in the well fought fight,”**

We know that in Christ, in the end we will be glorified and receive the victor's crown of gold. **This is most certainly true! AMEN**