

Three Parables.

Text: Matt 13:44-52

Suggested Hymns:

485, 305, 187, 294, 494

1) Parable of the Hidden Treasure

2) Parable of the Pearl of Great Price

3) Parable of the Dragnet

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 13:44–51, ⁴⁴ *“Again, 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.*

⁴⁵ *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶ who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.*

⁴⁷ *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, ⁴⁸ which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away.*

⁴⁹ *So it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰ and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” ⁵¹ Jesus said to them, “Have you understood all these things?” They said to Him, “Yes, Lord.” (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Matthew chapter 13 contains seven parables of Christ. Telling parables was a new way of teaching. Therefore the disciples asked, *“Why do You speak to them in parables?”*¹

The answer is given in Matthew 13:11–14, *“Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. ¹³ Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not*

see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled.

So it was because of unreceptiveness on the part of His hearers, that Christ spoke to them in parables. He had set forth by word and exhibited by fact (in His miracles) that kingdom of God which He had brought down to earth, is open to all believers.

The disciples' hearts had been opened to the divine truths spoken by the Saviour. To them it was given, given by the heavenly Father, to know the mysteries of God. The great majority of hearers, however, proved unreceptive to His words. Hence this teaching in parables was for judgement. Even what they seemingly had, would be taken away from them.

On the other hand, how wonderfully illuminating and instructive these parables are to those to whom it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God! What a wonderful illustration of divine wisdom! What an incentive to enter deeper into God's plan of salvation revealing His love and mercy for a sinful world; at the same time manifesting the state and condition of those hearts in which the Holy Spirit has begun His blessed work of regeneration!

We have before us today the last three of the seven parables. Those of the treasure and the pearl having much in common, though differing in some details. Both picture to us the state and condition of hearts having found in Christ the "one thing needful," thus having the kingdom of God within them. The Parable of the dragnet presents to us the kingdom in its final revelation and consummation.

Let us consider these three parables in more detail. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Parable Of The Hidden Treasure

Our text begins, "*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.*" The kingdom of God, or heaven, is where God rules; it comes to us, as Luther says, "*God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and live a godly life on earth now and in heaven for ever.*"²

By nature we are not in this kingdom, but under the power of darkness, under Satan's rule. This rule must be broken. God alone can do this, deliver us from its power, and establish His rule in us.

The kingdom of God has been brought by Christ into this world; but, as the treasure in the field, it is hidden. We read in 1 Corinthians 2:14, ¹⁴ *But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

The first parable tells us of a man who unexpectedly comes upon a treasure hidden in a field. It was a common practice for a wealthy person at that time to divide his wealth into thirds. One part he would keep in cash for carrying on business transactions. Another part he would invest in precious stones and jewels, which he could easily take with him if he ever had to flee from an advancing enemy army.

The third part he would bury in the ground somewhere, hoping to dig it up and reclaim it when he was able to come back home. Of course, such a person did not always come home, and his buried treasure's location might not be known to anyone else.

The man was perhaps ploughing in the field, his thoughts entirely engrossed in his work. Suddenly his plough-share grates upon the chest that contained the treasure. Or he may have been walking through a neighbour's field, when his eye was attracted by some sign revealing to him a great treasure. Centuries before it may have been hidden there.

Nevertheless, suddenly and unexpectedly he found it, without any effort of his own. It could change the whole course of his life. Therefore *for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

So, says our Lord, is the kingdom of heaven. Suddenly, in the midst of other thoughts and pursuits, a man is brought face to face with eternal, heavenly things — reading the Bible; hearing a sermon; sudden danger of death, etc. Circumstances that seem purely accidental capture his attention, and turn his mind heavenward.

How it is that now his mind is open to heavenly things while formerly engrossed entirely by earthly matters, he cannot tell, just as little as the man

ploughing in the field suddenly, unexpectedly, came upon the treasure. God's hour had come. The Lord had found him.

2. Parable Of The Pearl Of Great Price

The second parable introduces us to a man who is seeking something higher. He is not satisfied with ordinary, common pursuits. There is an inward longing and craving in man's heart for truth, and happiness.

This inward longing he tries to satisfy with what is regarded as noble and praiseworthy — art, science, high aims in the service of his fellow-men, etc. But all these things do not fill the inward void of his soul. He keeps on in his pursuits, changing from one to another, as described in Ecclesiastes. With the same result: *“All is vanity.”*

However, he keeps on earnestly, zealously, ceaselessly,— when, all at once, again perhaps as by accident, he finds Christ, salvation in Him, satisfying, filling completely all the longings and cravings of his heart, quenching the hunger and thirst of his soul. He has found the *“pearl of great price.”*

The important point in these parables is that which is common to both — the incomparable value of the kingdom of God, and the readiness with which one who perceives its value will give up all for it.

Our text says, *“when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”* We read in Romans 14:17 that *the kingdom of God is ... peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

There is a very wide-spread idea that true religion is a joyless, sad state of heart and mind. Nothing can be further from the truth. According to Scripture, true, living faith in Christ gives to the heart joys and pleasures which nothing else can give.

The hymnist wrote,³

Solid joys and lasting treasure
None but Zion's children know.

The value of the treasure and the pearl of great price is so great that both of these men sell everything they have in order to get into possession of the newly found treasure. They go at once, sell without hesitation and purchase without delay.

Alas, how often, especially in our days, we see professing Christians acting quite differently! We see them hesitating to part with anything for the kingdom of God. Many young people postponing repentance and surrendering of heart till later on in life, when the pleasures of life begin to fade. How sad! How foolish!

Can Satan and sin give greater joy and pleasure than Christ and His salvation? Let us examine ourselves in the light of these words of Christ.

Oh, that we may do this now, before the time comes of which the Saviour tells us in the Parable of the dragnet, the time of the revelation and consummation of His kingdom!

3. Parable Of The Dragnet

Today is the Third Last Sunday of the Church Year and this Parable of the dragnet directs our thoughts to the end of time. ***“So it will be at the end of the World.***

We are to consider what part the kingdom of heaven is to play then, when other kingdoms have played their parts, when things are being settled for eternity according to their value to God.

Our Lord wants us to consider the consummation of all things, when the great dragnet shall at last be drawn to shore, when there shall be no more mingling of good and bad, but division and separation.

Scripture says in 2 Corinthians 5:10 that ***we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, ... whether good or bad.***

This parable has much in common with the Parable of the Wheat and Tares.⁴

The Lord compares His own work, that of His apostles and the ministers of His Word, — the preaching of the Gospel in this world among the nations of this earth, — to the casting of a great dragnet and the drawing of it through the waters.

He spoke to fishermen, and he compared His work to theirs. While the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price shows us a man seeking the Kingdom, this parable presents to us the sight of the Kingdom seeking men.

The dragnet represents the preaching of the Gospel, the missionary Church at work in carrying out the command of the Saviour to preach the Gospel in all the

world. We are not to wait until the world comes to Christ, but use all means available to draw men to Christ.

Our text says, *and gathered some of every kind*. This goes on at all times. It was so in the days when Christ preached. Many people came to Him and heard His words. Most of them fell away and left Him.

Later on His disciples carried the message of Christ far and wide. Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, yes, it was heard of in the then-known world. The historian Eusebius wrote, *“Like a sunbeam it streamed over the face of the earth.”*

Missionaries by thousands are now bearing Christ’s Gospel to all continents and the furthestmost islands of the seas. And everywhere there are those that are drawn into the Gospel net, that enter into the Christian Church, at least outwardly.

Several parables teach us that the Church here on earth is a mixed body, of good and bad. Mere church connection is no more a proof and guarantee of acceptance with Christ than the presence in the net shows the goodness of the fish.

A day of sifting and sorting is coming. The dragnet, when full, is drawn to the shore, and the fish are sorted. *“Many are called, but few are chosen.”*⁵ Compare the guest at the king’s supper having on no wedding-garment,⁶ which means no faith. A revealing day, a testing day, must come for us all.

The wicked will be severed from the just, will be separated by the angels, who are able to distinguish between the hypocrite and the true believer.

As the tares are among the wheat in the field, so are the bad fish among the good in the net. As there, so we have here the terrible warning of Christ in our text, ⁵⁰*and cast them into the furnace of fire*.

If figures do not come up to the reality, the punishment of the sinner must be fearful in the extreme. *“There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”* The agony of despair. The distress of helpless rage and resentment. This, after the burning, shows that the burning of the wicked is not their consumption. “Destruction” in Scripture is not “annihilation.”

The time of the separation is when the dragnet shall be “filled.” The Gospel must first fulfil its commission in witnessing to all the world, as foretold by Christ in Matthew 24:14, ¹⁴ *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.*

What an incentive both to examine ourselves whether we have truly and sincerely received and accepted the Gospel by a living faith and to help in spreading its blessed message among the nations of the world! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew 13:10

² Second Petition of the Lord’s Prayer

³ Hymn 187

⁴ Matthew 13:24

⁵ Matthew 22:14

⁶ Matthew 22:11