

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

A SERMON

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“Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.” Matthew 13:46

WE are assured that the Lord “Has made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.” We gather from these words that he is the universal Governor of the world; and in matters that are natural he gives one man a taste for one order or line of life; another man a taste and abilities for another order or line of life. The apostle knew this; and therefore, he said, “Let every man abide in the calling wherein God has called him;” that is, wherein he can see the hand of the Lord. Now, as this is true in providential matters, so the Lord Jesus Christ, in this parable of the pearl of great price, spiritualizes the natural occupation of men. Here is a man that has a taste for merchandise and becomes a merchantman; and he begins to seek goodly pearls; and when he had found, as our text shows, one pearl of great price, he went and sold all the others, parted with all that he had, and bought this one pearl of great price. This merchantman, therefore, becomes a figure of a convinced sinner; for this merchantman was a living man literally, the same as the regenerated soul is a living soul spiritually; and that soul which has been seeking, as it were, straw, and wood, and stubble, and vanity now begins to seek something better, becomes a spiritual merchantman, not content now with things that are inferior and of no value; but he becomes a seeker after goodly pearls, he wishes to be enriched for eternity, he says, I have before me eternity, and I want something that will bear my expenses to all eternity the expenses of this life are only temporal, and we know not the moment when the whole may end; but there are expenses pertaining to a vast eternity! What is to supply my need for that eternity? Now all young hands of course in every business, especially where a good judgment and skill are required, young hands of course err sometimes. And so, with this merchantman; it appears he found pearls, but then they were counterfeit pearls; he was a young hand at present, and he was deceived by one and deceived by another; so that the pearls he had got were all counterfeits. But by and bye he found one of great price, a real one; and when he found this real one, he sold all that he had, and went and bought this real pearl of great price. Just so it is with the poor sinner. He seeks after something that will serve his turn for eternity; he gets hold of false doctrines, and thinks they are true ones; he gets hold of paper prayers, perhaps, and tries to make them do; gets hold of duties, resolutions, motives, and works, and doings, and thinks he is getting on pretty well. But by and bye it comes out that all this

is a counterfeit affair from first to last; and that so far from the man bettering his state, he is carrying on one of the worst of trades possible; he is cheating himself, and others are cheating him; and if he could follow his trade, he would rob the Almighty, he would rob the Savior, and rob the Gospel; and must be at the end of all his doings one of the worst characters in the world. Ah, my hearers, it is a solemn truth that thousands that die the best characters under the sun in their own estimation, and in the estimation of others, are in reality the worst of characters under the sun; they are wrapped up in their own doings; their language is, "I am rich, and have need of nothing;" their language is in relation to the pearl of great price, and to the real truth of God, their language is, away with it, away with it; I do not want it, for I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing. But the Lord will not allow his own children to die in that religion; he will undeceive them; he will meet them, and he will convince them that all the doctrines they have been receiving are counterfeits; and that so far from bettering their state, they are only making it ten times worse. And when the Lord thus opens the sinner's eyes; he says, now I want that that will really do me good; I want that that will really save my soul; I want that pearl of great price, Christ Jesus the Lord. And when he finds this one pearl of great price, he gladly parts with all he has, that he may receive and have the advantages of this one pearl of great price. Now the people of God, I say, then, shall not die in that delusion.

I generally enter with a great deal of diffidence upon these parables because there is always a danger of either not going quite far enough with the similes used, or else going farther than the Lord in his meaning intends. Therefore, I shall endeavor this morning to be very simple, and get as near as I can at the spirit and meaning of our text; and I shall do so under the three ideas which naturally suggest themselves. The first, then, here is *the pearl of great price*; and the second is, *its cost*; "Went and sold all that he had, and bought it;" and the third is, *the advantages of his having so done*.

First: First is, THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE. The very word price will direct me in what way to notice this part of my subject. The apostle Paul says, "We are bought with a price." Some have thought that the pearl of great price here spoken of is the church; and that Christ is the merchantman seeking the church; and that when he had found the church he went and laid down his life, parted as it were with all he had, and bought this church. Well, that is true, but that is not the way in which I shall handle the subject this morning. I shall take the pearl of great price, in the first place, as the price of our redemption and secondly, what it is to sell all that we have, that we may buy or possess this pearl of great price; and then, thirdly, the advantages thereof. First, the price of our redemption. Now we are under God's holy law, and there is nothing that can deliver us from that, but the Lord Jesus Christ himself; he is our redemption therefrom; that is to say, not one jot or tittle of God's eternal law can fail; its precept and its penalty must stand good; and the Lord Jesus Christ is the only person that could meet its precept, or that could meet its penalty. Now let us look at this redemption; let us look at the way in which this pearl of great price is found; let us look at the path which the Lord marks out in which that soul walks that shall find this pearl of great price; and if it should so prove as I go along that if you have not yet found this pearl of great price for yourself, if you cannot yet feel quite sure that the Savior has died for you; yet if I can find that you are a seeker, if I can find that you are in the path that will certainly lead to the discovery, or rather I may say to the possession, of this pearl of great price, that will encourage you in a way infinitely beyond anything that I can this morning set before you. Now, in Isaiah 51, we have the great subject of redemption set before us, and we have the path also that leads to that redemption. We read there,

“The redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion.” Here is redemption then. Let it be known to my soul that Jesus Christ is the price of my redemption, that he has paid all my debts, past, present and to come; the way is clear, life is clear, death is clear, eternity is clear, all is clear, and all is well. The Lord describes the path leading to it in this way, “Hearken to me, you that follow after righteousness, you that seek the Lord.” The poor sinner that has no righteousness of his own but has heard of a righteousness somewhere; a righteousness that is imputed unto them that believe; he will seek after the manifestation to his soul of justification by the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And notice the beautiful ideas put together, “You that follow after righteousness, you that seek the Lord.” The idea seems this, says the poor sinner, I can see the righteousness, now I want the Lord to tell me it is mine; I can see the righteousness, now I want the Holy Spirit to show me it is mine, so that I shall be enabled to say with the apostle, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? it is God that justifies.” The two ideas are put together. The man that is taught of God is not content to follow after righteousness, but he seeks the Lord. “Look unto the rock whence you are hewn.” The rock there of course will mean the world, just look at the world, survey it, and see if there be any part with which you can in these matters feel one? It is almost superfluous for me to say that a sinner convinced of sin is no longer one with the profligate world, the ungodly world, the profane world. There are thousands upon thousands who have no religion at all, at least who make no profession, and there are thousands whose conversion is merely moral, and hardly that, that can boast of separation from the world when taken in that artificial sense, but we must go closer than that before we can bless God that we are hewn out of the rock, that we love the habitation of his house, and the place where his honor dwells; and where he is not honored, there we cannot be happy. But let us look closer. “Look unto the rock whence we are hewn.” The rock there of course will mean the whole body of human nature altogether. Now we are hewn out from that, the fallen rock of human nature, the dead, the barren, the hard rock of human nature; and consequently, being severed from it, we have no confidence in it whatever; the flesh has become nothing to us, there is an entire separation. “Look unto the rock whence you are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence you are dug.” Now how is it, with us in this matter? Can we say that we have no confidence in the flesh, can we say that the hardness and the barrenness, and the worthlessness, of the flesh is made manifest unto us, so that if we have the slightest confidence whatever, it must be in that way which the Lord directs? After then looking at the flesh in this way and being brought into such a state that all fleshly confidence is destroyed, and to see that we are lying in the pit of sin, and in the pit of wrath, and virtually in the pit of hell, if we are severed from all fleshly confidence, this is a proof that we are hewn out from our state by nature and dug out of that pit wherein there is no water. Now mark what we are to do. “Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you; for I called him alone.” I called him; it is the work of God; “and blessed him and increased him.” Now there is one thing very clear concerning Abraham; there was no free will in the matter; it stands out perfectly clear that his call was entirely of the sovereign power and pleasure of the blessed God, the Lord called him, the Lord blessed him, the Lord increased him, increased him in fellowship, as we see in reading the history of Abraham, that Abraham was increased in divine revelations made to his soul, in fellowship with eternal things. Nothing can be clearer then, that there was neither free-will nor duty-faith in this matter. Now this is the path that leads to the discovery and the possession of the pearl of great price; I must be severed from fleshly confidence, I must see something of the horrible pit in which I am by nature; I must look to the Lord in the same way that Abraham did; and my confidence must be entirely where his confidence was. Then just see how minutely the Lord describes the experience of the soul walking in this path, “The Lord shall comfort Zion;”

meaning those persons belonging to Zion, "he will comfort all her waste places." Now look at that, "he will comfort all her waste places." Why, that sinner can in the sight of a heart-searching God say, O Lord, then if the waste place is to be comforted, I am that waste place, for in my flesh dwells no good thing. Lord, I am poor, and needy, and helpless, and destitute, I have not a single vestige of holiness, nor anything else: apart from yourself and from your Son, I am that waste place. The Lord will comfort him; that will all be done when the pearl of great price shall come in and set the prisoner free. "And he will make her wilderness like Eden." So that the reason he does not comfort you yet, is that you are not bad enough; you are only a waste place, you must become a wilderness, more solitary still; you must become like an owl of the desert in your own feelings, and estimation, you must become like a pelican of the wilderness, like a sparrow alone upon the house top, wander about in a solitary way, and find no city to dwell in. Is this the way to the pearl of great price? It is. Is this the way to fellowship with God? It is. Is this the way to heaven? It is. Is this the path the vulture's eye has not seen, nor the lion's whelps trodden? It is. It is the path in which every living soul ever must travel. "He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord;" worse still; just now it was only a waste place, then it becomes a wilderness, a wilderness is a solitary place; now it is a desert, the very word desert, as you are aware, means desert, that is deserted; the confidence that you had in everything will desert, you, you will feel the wretchedness of your state as being without Christ, without hope, and without God in the world. This is the path. Now what is to be done when brought into this path? The Lord tells us to do something, "Lift up your eyes to the heavens;" you are weary of looking at your own doings; they are all gone; you are surprised that your good works are all passed away after all your strivings and doings; you are surprised. Ah, here is something that will surprise you more. "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath, for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner; but my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished." How is it with you, my hearer? Are you brought far enough to see that there is not anything but God's salvation that will stand good? that there is not anything but his eternal righteousness that will stand good? I will tell you, if you have got thus far, what God will do with you. He will give you the spirit of prayer; that is what he will do: and when he gives you the spirit of prayer after the right order, deliverance is not far off. You find the prayer thus recorded, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord." Ah, poor sinner! cannot you lift yourself out? cannot you shake your enemies off; cannot you stretch out your right hand, and bring to yourself the victory? The Lord puts a great number of questions to Job, all of them human impossibilities; and the Lord said to Job, "When you can do these things, then will I also confess unto you that your own right hand can save you." Ah, Lord, says Job, I will give it up; I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes, to think I could ever have supposed I could do anything to save my own soul; if my right hand cannot save me, Lord, till I have done all these things, then I will give it up self despair. Then comes in the spirit of prayer. Well, if my right arm is withered, that it cannot save me, the Lord's arm is not withered, that it cannot save me. If my ear is dull in listening to his truth, his ear is not heavy; his ear attends the softest call: his eye can never sleep. "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Are you not it that has cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Are you not it which has dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that has made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" Let me solemnly ask every one of you this morning, does your religion find something great for the Almighty to do? can you say that to you sin appears to be that which Omnipotence alone can put away? that Satan appears to you to be that great power that omnipotence alone can put under your feet? that the curse is to you that which an

Almighty Savior alone could agonize and bear away? that hell is that from which Jehovah in his omnipotence alone can deliver you? Oh, if so, then your prayer will not be mere form: it will be a real, solemn, earnest, living, desire that the Lord would come in the greatness of his almighty power, give you the victory, and bring you into possession of the pearl of great price, that you may realize the blessed truth that it really is yours. And now comes the pearl of great price. "Therefore, the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion." Oh, that is what I want. "The redeemed of the Lord," "redeemed of the Lord," redeemed by this pearl of great price, that is, Christ; "they who are redeemed shall return, and come with singing." Lord, hitherto I have come only with sighing; everything has been a burden to me, everything has been a distress to me; I have been in the house of mourning. I feel I have a heart full of infirmities; I find, Lord, I am always murmuring at your dealings with me; and I am a poor, miserable creature; sometimes wish I had never existed; sometimes wonder how the Almighty could have been so cruel as to bring me into existence, or suffer me to exist in the wretched state in which I am. Oh, how thoroughly the Lord will destroy all self gratulatory confidences; how thoroughly will he bring us to loathe ourselves in our own sight. "The redeemed of the Lord shall return and come with singing." Let the Blessed Spirit bring home this great truth with power, that Jesus Christ has met all my debts, that he has paid the uttermost penny, and there, is nothing to sigh about; not in him; a great deal to sigh about in us, but not in him. "They shall come with singing unto Zion." That indicates a great, many things; let me mention one or two. It indicates in the first place their entire freedom from sin by this redemption; it indicates in the next place the order by which they expect to get to heaven, to Zion; and it indicates something else, and that is a true welcome and acceptance; there is no drawback in this department to stop their singing. I do not know whether the prodigal did in his heart sing after his father met him, but I should say he did; but you may depend upon it that before that, the prodigal went all the way sighing. I wonder whether I shall be received at all; I wonder in what way I shall be treated; I wonder what, will be done with me. Ah, presently the Father appears, the Father appears in his love, appears in electing grace, appears in predestinating favor, appears in and by his dear Son; appears in the order of mercy; falls upon the prodigal's neck, kisses him, has compassion on him while he is yet a long way off. Then he found the pearl of great price; his sorrow was turned into joy, his mourning into dancing, and his trembling into triumphs. See what a welcome was there. And so, by this precious redemption of Christ we have an infinite welcome to God the Father, an infinite welcome to Christ, an infinite welcome to the blessed Spirit.

Second: After these few feeble remarks I shall describe in the next place as well as I can, what it is to sell all we have. He sold all that he had and bought this one pearl of great price. I shall take the 14th chapter of Luke to explain this part of our text; and that is all I can do from time to time in the other few months or years I have to live, just set before you the word of the Lord; that is all I can do. I shall take then the 14th chapter of Luke to explain the meaning here. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yes, and his own life also he cannot be my disciple." There is no difficulty in understanding the word hate here; the meaning of course is that in whatever respect my nearest relations, however much I love them, and it is right I should love them, however much I care for them, and it is right I should care for them; however much I strive in every possible way to do them good, and it is right I should do so, as the Lord may enable me; yet in whatever respect my nearest relation stands opposed to God in these truths, in that respect I cannot walk with him. If the husband hates the truth, and the wife love it, or if the wife hates the truth, and the husband love it; the one must hold fast the truth, let the relative be as dear as he or she may. But in all those respects where the truth of God is not

affected, that is another thing altogether; but in those respects, in which your relation stand opposed to the truth, and would be content only by your giving up that truth; in those respects, we must love the truth of God, and hate them; not hate them personally, but in their antipathy to God's truth; and keep apart therefrom. "Yes, and his own life also," Now if I were called upon to give up my life, or else God's truth, I know which I should do if left to myself; quite sure. I would as soon trust the devil in this matter as I would trust myself. If I were called upon to appear before the inquisition tomorrow, I am as sure that I should give up God's truth as I am of my own existence, if Almighty grace did not keep me; but my prayer would be to be kept; and my encouragement would be that thousands have been kept; and that the same God that kept them can keep us; and has the same love, and the same grace, and the same power now that he had then. But if I were told, you must either give up God's truth or give up your life, I should not be a true disciple if I were willfully, willingly, and permanently to give up God's truth. There may be a transitory renunciation, as in the case of Peter, and Cranmer, and thousands of others; but then the Lord has sometimes suffered a good man to break his bones in order that the bone may be set and made stronger than it was before it was broken. So many of those men who under the influence of fear have for the time being repudiated God's truth, have not continued in that repudiation many days; they have been so unhappy that their unhappiness at having done so has been much greater than all the tortures that men could inflict upon them, and therefore, the very unhappiness has given rise to that courage that has made them loathe themselves, and to triumph in the midst of the flames at last. Therefore, we must part with all that is dear to us in the ties of nature so far as it opposes God's truth, and part even with our own life, in so far as we are called upon to do so, rather than part with God's truth. Then the Savior says, "And whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." I wish I could see our ministers over the country a little more willing to bear the cross than many of them are. They aim at two things, and they get neither; they are aiming to be respected and applauded by men as very nice men, and to avoid the opprobrium of being called Antinomians; to avoid the charge of preaching Antinomianism, and dangerous doctrines. What is the result? Why, these men become cold, poor and miserable; and they are all cold and clammy together, whereas if they had the courage to come right out, and preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, and hearken to neither friend nor foe, but take forth the precious from the vile, they would then be as God's mouth. Ministers need great firmness in this respect. I will listen to nobody. I have always been called a dangerous man, and always shall be called so, but I care not for it; I will go on preaching the truth and listen neither to friend nor foe. We must bear the cross. It is decision for the truth that makes the world hate you, that is the great secret of it. And the Savior wishes us to understand the importance of this matter when he says, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sits not down first and counts the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?" If I find this pearl of great price, this eternal redemption, there is no danger of my stopping. "The redeemed of the Lord shall return and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head; they shall obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and mourning shall flee away." That is God's testimony. Now, then, that being God's I can finish my tower fast enough; they will not be able to say, Ah, this man began to build, and he is not able to finish. They have not been able to say that yet, and they will never be for I have quite sufficient to finish it; this pearl of great price furnishes me with the means; I shall have for time and eternity quite sufficient. "Or what king, going to make war against another king, sits not down first, and consults whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an ambassador, and desires conditions of peace;" humiliating conditions, of course. But give me this pearl of great price, I shall never desire

conditions of peace; I shall have no peace with the profane world, with the duty-faith world; **I will have no fellowship, no personal friendship, with any duty-faith minister; I have no antipathy towards him, but I will have no personal friendship with him, because it leads to truth's compromise.** It cost a man of God his life when he entered into personal friendship with the false prophet of Bethel; that led to a compromise of his mission; and a lion met him and killed him. There is God's solemn testimony against the conduct of the minister in that respect. Sufficient to go with ten thousand? Yes. Let me have the Lord, and ten thousand of his people on my side, and I would go against the devil and his hosts; and as Asa did, when not only twenty thousand, but a million of Ethiopians came against him, he cried unto the Lord, and he heard him, and gave the victory to Israel. There is not anything too hard for the Lord. "Except a man forsake all that he has, he cannot be my disciple;" your own holiness, your own righteousness, your own good name; all these are worth nothing; you must forsake all trust in them; there is not anything worth possessing in comparison of this pearl of great price.

I have said now only about one-tenth of what I wanted to say, but I must say no more upon this subject, only a few remarks, with which I close.

Third: Let us look at some of THE ADVANTAGES OF POSSESSING THIS PEARL OF GREAT PRICE, of possessing this redemption. The 21st chapter of Revelation will explain this part of our subject, the advantages of possessing this pearl of great price; and so, would the 33rd chapter of Deuteronomy; But I must not go to that. Now Christ is the Pearl of Great Price, and the Bible is a suggestive book; see what we have suggested in this chapter, "The city had twelve gates; and the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every single gate was of one pearl." What does this show? That we have admittance to that city by Jesus Christ, we enter in by Jesus Christ. "And the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass." And what sort of a temple is it? One that can never be thrown down. "I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." Did you ever notice that term "Almighty," placed with God's character as a temple? It is an almighty temple, that is the idea of it. What a safe house to live in, is it not? Now you want a very strong house to live in forever, you know, and there it is, "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." It is a remarkable thing, that this omnipotence is placed with that character of the temple. "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." The Lamb! Yes, we could not dwell there without the Lamb. "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it." Why not? For the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." O! then, if we are to dwell there by the Lamb, and if we are to be scrutinized by what the Lamb constitutes us, if we are to be investigated by infinite Justice by what the Lamb constitutes us, then we can bear the light. There is no other way in which the sinner can bear the light than by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. The glory of God in the new covenant does lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. "And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it." What a beautiful text that has been for some of our earthly millenarians, "The kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it." What in the world shall we want with Queen Victoria's throne there, I want to know, what in the world shall we want with those official gentlemen there? Well, but it does say they shall bring their glory and honor into it. Yes, their honor is God's truth, their glory is God's truth, they bring with them the pearl of great price, and that is how they enter the city. "And there shall in no way enter into it anything that defiles, neither whatsoever works abomination;" taught by the Spirit of God, reconciled to God, they have peace with God through Christ's righteousness; and they

cannot work abomination, “nor that makes a lie;” led to renounce all confidence in the flesh, they cannot make a lie. And mark the beautiful winding up of their character; “but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life;” they are the persons, the only persons, that enter in.

Thus, then, I have tried to describe the pathway to this pearl of great price: what is meant by parting with all that we have to obtain it, and I have given but a very poor account of the advantages that follow upon that possession of this pearl of great price.