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## The Treasure and the Pearl

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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*"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in the field; which a man found, and hid; and in his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls: and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it." Matthew 13:44-46.*

The multitude has gone or has been left (vs. 36). The Lord is alone with His disciples. He is interpreting to them what He has said to the multitude. Then He adds three more "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven". Two of these are undoubtedly twins, they belong to each other.

Various interpretations have been given and usually they have been interpreted as being two entirely different things. It is not easy to be dogmatically final about this especially if a new interpretation is suggested. But there are some things about which we are surely agreed. These are -

(1) The "Man" in both cases is the same "Man" as sowed good seed, firstly in the form of the Word of God, and then in the form of genuine Christians, over against "darnel". The seeker here in these two parables is not an unbeliever nor a believer.

However much we sing, and shall go on singing

"I've found the Pearl of greatest price,  
My heart doth sing for joy;

And sing I must, a Christ I have:  
Oh, what a Christ have I" -

all that is true *excepting its association with the parable.*

(2) The "field" and the "sea", where the treasure and the pearl are respectively, correspond to the earlier field of the Sower, and the sea of the drag-net. It is one thing - the world. Jesus purchased the world at the cost of all that He had. It is His by right of redemption, although that right is repudiated, and therein is the ground of judgment, as He has shown elsewhere.

(3) Neither Jesus, the kingdom of heaven, nor Salvation are up for sale to the highest bidder. Who has the fabulous wealth required? Who has a sufficient "all" to procure this? The idea of our buying the treasure or pearl would rule out entirely the whole nature and truth of grace.

Whatever we might 'count as refuse that we might gain Christ' is an after thing when we have already found and come to possess Him, and only speaks of how little everything is in comparison. Paul would never weigh the "things which were gain" as a *price* for Christ, but only as "refuse" in comparison. Those things just went, they were not sold for Christ.

We are brought to common ground in our interpretation when we alight upon one idea, it is that of preciousness, and preciousness to the Seeker.

If Christ is that Divine Seeker then there is that which is of superlative value to Him. In the light of the Holy Spirit's later fuller revelation of the "mysteries of the kingdom" have we any guidance as to what these precious things are? I think we have. As to the treasure, is not this the answer, "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for it" (Eph. 5:25): referring back to verse 2 where the reference is to the Church - "as Christ... loved you, and gave himself up for us (or you), an offering and a sacrifice to God". "The church of God which he purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). This is the only realm where purchasing comes in. All the teaching concerning the Church and its superlative value to the Lord finds its place here.

Our point, at the moment, is just this: if the Church is of such transcendent and inestimable value to Christ, ought it not to have such a place with us?

If *this* love were shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit would it not be a corrective to criticism, division, suspicion, and exclusiveness? Would it not be a directive as to how to approach the rumours, reports, and suggestions which could otherwise be so disaffecting? Would it not cut an immense amount of ground from under the Devil's feet in his campaign to frustrate the great purpose of God as bound up with the Church? Would it not be the ground on which the Holy Spirit would repeat His mighty work throughout the world, as at the beginning? "Christ loved the church". So ought we to love.

But what of the pearl of great price?

In what we are going to say we want to repeat that we would not be dogmatic that this is *the* interpretation of the parable, but there is little doubt that there is truth in what we say.

It is difficult to make two *separate* objects of the Treasure and the Pearl, just as it is difficult to allow

of two all-inclusive prices being paid. If "all that he had" has gone for one thing, then it cannot go for another. Surely these are two aspects of the same thing? It is true that the Church inclusively, and without exception is the object of the uttermost love and giving, but it is also clear that the Church's uttermost love for the Lord is included in His desire and longing. As it turns out we find the Church divided in this respect, and the last New Testament picture of churches is one of a dividedness of love. The messages to the seven churches are surely - while judicial; - an appeal from Him who is "girded about *the breasts* with a *golden girdle*" for "first love". The division is between being Christ's and being *utterly* Christ's. The final symbolic picture of the Church is "the new Jerusalem", and her gates are of *pearl*. Does not all this point to a particular preciousness to the Lord of that fruit of His sufferings born in believers and proved by their willingness to suffer with and for Him? The pearl is the symbol of suffering, suffering unto agony, and agony producing beauty and great preciousness.

Said Paul, "I fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ, *for his body's sake*, which is the church". Is not this something infinitely precious to Christ? Would He not give all for a Church that so loves Him?

We leave it there. Whether it is what He meant by the second parable, we will not contend, but we are sure that this is something supported by very much in the Word of God.