

A Pearl of Great Price

by T. Austin-Sparks

The church is precious and valuable to the Lord, and it must embody His selectiveness, distinctiveness, preciousness, fullness, and finality, as well as His suffering.

Duration: 22:50

Scripture: Matthew 13:45

Topics: "Jesus Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the parable found in Matthew 13:45-46, where Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a merchant seeking valuable pearls. The preacher assumes that the 'pearl of great price' mentioned in the parable represents the church, and Jesus is the merchant seeking it. The sermon emphasizes the distinctiveness and selectiveness of the church, as it is something chosen and valued by Jesus above all else. The preacher also highlights the suffering and sacrifice that Jesus made for the church, emphasizing its preciousness and finality.

Transcript

In the Gospel by Matthew, chapter 13, verses 45 and 46, again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pals, and having found one pal of great price, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. Without any time taken to establish what I feel is an accepted fact, we assume that this pal of great price is the church, that the merchant man seeking goodly pals is Christ, and that this is his own description of his church. Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it.

Of course, here, the time when the Lord Jesus said this, the church was not actually in existence on the earth. It was born on the day of Pentecost. So, neither was it fully formed and perfected.

It was not actually the pal. But this is the Lord's description of what he was seeking, and of what the church is in his own heavenly might. A pal of great price.

If, then, this is a true interpretation, that this pal represents the church, we can pass to the next conclusion, which I think is also beyond debate. That what is true in the Lord's mind of the whole should be true in every part. That is, what the church in general, universal, is in the mind of the Lord, should be, in all its parts, locally.

If that, again, is a true interpretation, every local company or part of the body of Christ should correspond to this description. A pal. And a pal of great price.

Very briefly, let us look at some of the features and characteristics of this pal, as they are included in this description. First of all, the principle of selectiveness is seen at work, seeking goodly pals, and when he had found one, of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it, the whole wonderful truth of divine choice. If you like, election.

For the moment, selectiveness is here before us in his words. Something that the Lord has selected, has chosen, has decided upon, amongst many other things that he might have of lesser value, as the thing that answers to his heart. That great principle and truth of selectiveness, of course, is right at the heart of the revelation which has come to us in the New Testament.

He is a chosen vessel unto me, said the Lord about Paul. And Paul transferred that very truth to the Church, chosen in him before the foundation. Ye are an elect race.

Something selected by the Lord to serve him in the satisfaction of his own nature, his own heart, to fulfill a specific purpose in his eternal counsel. Chosen, selected for something. The Lord's selectiveness is not just that he prefers that, but it is related to something which only that can serve him.

It's something specific. Only that can do that. He selects as he would select, changing the metaphor, a tool by which alone he could do a certain piece of work.

Just that. Anything else won't do. Anything other won't do.

It's that. And I entreat you, dear friends, to lay hold of these things, simple as they may sound, and believe that if that is true of the Church as a whole, that is to be true of any part of the Church, anywhere. Something that has not just come into being willy-nilly or by any other way than the Lord chose to have that.

The Lord selected that. The Lord picked that out for something. Now, if that were true, what meaning it would give to everything, wouldn't it? It would place everything upon a basis of meaning and significance, and it would exclaim so much.

That, then, as we go on. Then, not only selectiveness, but distinctiveness. It's here inherent in this parable in two short verses.

Distinctiveness. This is different. This is different.

This is something particular, something peculiar, something in itself. It's distinguished. Amongst all the powers that might be, this is different.

It must be different, both to satisfy Him and to fulfill His purpose. And you at once realize that that could be followed out along many lines and many connections. But here again, as a part of the great revelation of the Church, it is something different.

Fundamentally different. Characteristically different. It's not all of a piece with anything and everything else.

It's distinguished. His eyes, we follow the parable, pass over many things. This, this is different.

This is different. We do need to ask the Lord what that means. We know that the Church is different.

The true Church is different. But Paul, on more than one occasion, spoke about the things which differ. The things which differ.

Even in the realm of Christianity, the things which differ. You and I need that faculty for discernment and discrimination, insight and perception, to see things that differ. Not just the great difference between the Church and the world, of course, there's that.

We don't have any difficulty over that. But there are differences in an inner circle between things, this and that. And it is just that distinctiveness that the Lord really is after.

This, this is something with a distinctive value and a distinctive character. And if you like, a distinctive message. This is something which is distinguished as clear-cut and clearly defined and not mixed up in a jumble of all sorts of things.

It stands out. There's no mistaking the character of this. It's different.

It's just different. You may not be able to explain or define the difference, but the verdict is, it's different. That is true about the Church, isn't it? We all agree as to the Church, according to God's mind, is something very distinct in God's universe.

Outstanding. To be like that in every part of its expression, locally. The next thing, so obvious, it's preciousness in the sight of the Lord.

A pal, here is the description, of great price. Of great price. Something very precious to the Lord.

We know what it cost Him, the price that He paid for it. Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for it. The Church of God, which He purchased with His own blood, and so on and on.

Very precious to the Lord. Do we not need, dear friends, to redeem our mentality regarding the Church, and that locally, from cheapness, commonplace, regarding it too lightly? Or to put that the other way, do we not need a very much greater conception of how tremendously valuable a true expression of the Church is to the Lord? It's priceless. He puts its value like this, sold all.

If you can measure that, in the case of the Lord Jesus, you can measure that. You're approximating to the measure of the value of the Church, universal and local, to the Lord, when it corresponds to His mind. A pal, a great price.

Very precious. And when we're talking like that, of course, we're talking about one another, aren't we? It's about one another, that's all. It can be put in many ways.

Paul put it another way. The hand cannot say to the foot, I have no need of you. We can dispense with you.

Nothing cheap in the body of Christ. Nothing can be discarded like that, as without value. Great price.

Next. Here is represented in this pal everything. Fullness and finality.

For this divine merchant man, it was everything. It wasn't one of a number of things. It was not just a bit better than others.

It was not an alternative. He had something else, as we say, up his sleeve if it failed. For him, it was everything.

And, if it's everything, that's final. Nothing beyond it. Now, you are familiar enough with all the New Testament teaching about the Church to know that it is the fullness of Him.

He hasn't something extra that if it fails, well, it doesn't matter so much, it's failed, I've got something else that I can draw upon, put in its place. No. Nothing can take its place.

He has nothing else to take its place. If we fail him locally, he hasn't something to put in our place. He's not got a lot of things in reserve very well.

If that fails, I do this. No, no. It's everything and it's final.

See, that gives the sense both of fullness and of permanence, doesn't it? To what is according to the Lord's mind. He'll look after that. That's permanent.

That's final. If that were taken from him, well, everything is taken from him because he's put everything into it. But, that means that it represents the finality of the Lord's interest there.

The finality of the Lord's interest there. When Israel abode in the figure of Zion, or Jerusalem, did fail the Lord in the purpose of its election, the Lord had no alternative. The glory went up and was removed and went away, went right away.

He had no second best. No second best. It was all or nothing.

Fullness. Finality with that which has come out of his heart. His church.

And lastly, again so evident, here is in all this, in all this, in his selectiveness, in its distinctiveness, in its preciousness, in its fullness and finality, it is the embodiment of his suffering. How is that? It is the very synonym of suffering. Its very being is the result of suffering, of wounding and bleeding, the alchemy of suffering, transmuting.

A thing like this, an expression like this in the church, general or local, has to embody his suffering. Not only his suffering substitutionally, that is of course fundamental, but his sufferings constitutionally. Paul said, I fill up that which remains of the sufferings of Christ for his body's sake, which is the church, the sufferings of Christ for his church, Christ loved and gave.

The church is the embodiment of his suffering, but then, on that side, not substitutionally, but constitutionally and vocationally, the church is very life's piece of suffering. It's a costly thing in that way. This is not something that just happens, not just some gay life.

This that is to serve the Lord in this way, in character and purpose, is something realized through its own suffering in fellowship with him. There is the agony of the pile in formation, nothing short of agony. And in order to have something like this, I think the Lord of necessity has, from time to time, to baptize us afresh into his suffering, to bring back the agony.

It's a good thing, a good thing, a painful thing, distressing thing, but a good thing if we are brought to the place where that which is of the Lord, where we are concerned, is so precious that it causes us an agony if we see it in any way assailed. In danger, of loss, it's an agony. The Lord precipitates that in order to have

a power, you see.

There is no power without suffering, in itself. And while the sufferings of Christ are, in one sense, his peculiar and unique sufferings, in the redemptive sense, there are the sufferings of Christ which are passed to us, into which we are called. The agony for the church.

Have you got any agony for the church? Sure you have. Real bleeding for the church, local, as well as universal. And perhaps it comes nearer home to us when it's local.

But the Lord give us more of this anguish for his church as a whole, as well as for our part of it, suffering, for his body's sake. So that everything is kept on this very practical, no theory, mere theory and doctrine and teaching, truth of an agony, a real tragedy. And then, it will be precious to him, the merchant man, seeking goodly powers.

See what it says? The kingdom of heaven is like that. The kingdom of heaven, this is a heavenly quest for a heavenly thing. And these are the characteristics of a heavenly thing in the eyes and mind of the Lord.

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