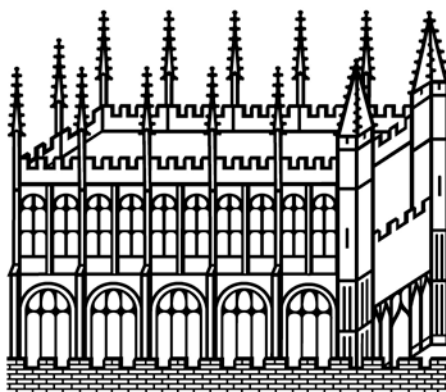




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THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE



SERMON LXXXII.

MATTHEW XIII. 45, 46.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE UNTO A MERCHANTMAN, SEEKING GOODLY PEARLS ; WHO, WHEN HE HAD FOUND ONE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE, WENT AND SOLD ALL THAT HE HAD AND BOUGHT IT.

THE true nature of the christian religion may be easily learned from the parables of Christ. It was well known that whenever the Messiah should make his appearance, he would set up a new kingdom in the world ; but the nature of that kingdom was miserably mistaken by the jews. To prevent mistake our Lord gives us many parables, especially in this chapter, which plainly describe its true nature, as a *spiritual* kingdom ; not one that should "come with observation," or outward show and splendour, like the kingdoms of this world, but which should be of an internal kind, and consist in "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

This parable, as well as that which precedes it, seems intended to point out the excellency of Christ and his great salvation, in the esteem of all true christians. In the former parable, he is compared to treasure hid in a field, which a man having discovered, parts with all his possessions in order to purchase the field, and to make the hidden treasure his own. In this parable, our Saviour is compared to a pearl, extremely valuable and precious, which a merchant, who was in quest of fine pearls, having met with, sells all his property in order to purchase it.

We may express the principal design of these words in the following observation :—

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THOSE PERSONS WHO KNOW THE VALUE OF CHRIST, WILL PRIZE AN INTEREST IN HIM ABOVE ALL THINGS.

The person represented in this parable as having found a pearl of great value, was in quest of precious jewels—a merchant; a dealer in jewels, accustomed to travel from one country to another, in search of such valuable articles, in order to obtain wealth by their purchase and sale. This aptly represents the man (indeed every man) who is searching for happiness; whose language is, “Who will do me any good?” The pursuits of men are various; but their principal object is the same; it is certainly happiness; happiness under some form or other; whether in the pleasures of sense, or the gratification of the mind. It is in the low and mean enjoyment of sensual pleasure that the bulk of mankind seek delight; to eat, to drink, to sleep: to be easy, gay, and merry, is all that the multitude seek. Others, more refined, direct their attention to arts or arms; they long to shine in courts or camps; to get a great name, and make a great figure in the world, and to obtain titles, and wealth, and distinction. These are the pearls which worldly men are seeking with great assiduity to possess, which few are able to obtain, and which, if obtained, are far from making the possessor happy. May I not say that Solomon was a merchant of this description; that he sailed round the world to obtain this jewel, happiness, and returned after a tedious voyage with his vessel empty? Hear his own confession, as recorded in the first chapter of Ecclesiastes: “Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” He tells us what he had tried: he had tried mirth, and costly entertainments, and gay amusements; and, after all, vanity was the total sum; yea, such was his vexation too, in consequence of repeated disappointments, that he says, “I hated my life.” Vexation at his failure made life a burden to him. Some worldly men are honest enough to make the same confession; and many of them do so when on a dying-bed, and in the prospect of a vast eternity; and such must all men make when

they come to die, who have not been happy enough to find this pearl of great price.

But we may consider, not only the man who is in pursuit of worldly good as the merchant, but those persons also who are *religiously disposed*, who wish to be virtuous and good, but who as yet know not the Lord, and have never discovered from the gospel his inestimable worth. Man has been called, by some philosophers, "A religious animal;" and indeed it is wonderful to observe that, in almost all countries, some sense of religion prevails; some adoration is paid to a Deity; there is a dread of his anger, and a desire of his favour. A consciousness of guilt, and an apprehension of death, judgment, and eternity, strengthened by the custom of their forefathers, the laws of their country, and the example of the multitude, induce those who are not atheistical or brutish, to perform some religious ceremonies, in hope of the Divine favour, and frequently to obtain the applause of their fellow-men.

But it is truly pitiable to think how many, "being ignorant of God's righteousness, go about," as St. Paul said of the jews, "to establish their own righteousness; not submitting to the righteousness of God" as revealed in the gospel. Many will repeat a prodigious number of prayers, keep many fasts, submit to irksome penances, shut themselves up for life in monasteries and nunneries; and others will go tedious pilgrimages for hundreds of miles; yea, some will undergo bodily torments, and death itself, to secure eternal happiness. And this is the language of the person introduced by the prophet Micah, (chapter vi. 6,) "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression? the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Here is a person represented as bidding high indeed for eternal life, and willing to obtain it at the greatest expense; but it is the language of one who as yet is ignorant of Christ. And how many

persons, among ourselves, for want of better information, profess a cold and comfortless religion; a system of painful restraints, and drudgery in duties, having no settled peace nor joy, but serving God with the spirit of a slave! But, if it please him to bring the inquirer, by the gospel, to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, as an all-sufficient Saviour, full of grace and truth; who, by his obedience and his sufferings, has brought in an everlasting righteousness, by which every believer is fully and for ever justified; and if brought to see that all the blessings of his great salvation are perfectly free, “without money and without price,” without any meritorious qualifications whatever,—then is he like the merchant in the text, who, in the course of his journeys and inquiries, meets at last with a jewel of such extraordinary magnitude, beauty and perfection, as infinitely to exceed all he had ever seen or heard of before; and finding that it is possible to make it his own, and thereby insure an immense fortune, he is glad to obtain it by any means; most willingly he parts with all he has, well knowing it is worth more than all, and that, by the loss of all, he shall become an unspeakable gainer.

By this striking similitude, our Lord here represents the true convert, the real christian. He discovers by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, in the use of the gospel, that Jesus Christ is truly excellent, superlatively excellent; he feels a vehement desire to be interested in him, and is ready, willingly, yea, most gladly, to part with everything for his sake. You will clearly see how wisely he thinks and acts, if you will consider for a moment wherein this superior excellency of Christ consists.

Consider his personal dignity and glory. “Who is he, that we may believe in him?” His name is “*Immanuel*,” “God with us.” “He is the Son of God; the only begotten of the Father; the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his Person:”

“All human beauties, all Divine,
In our Beloved meet and shine.”

In him are combined all the glorious perfections of

Deity, and all the unsullied excellences of humanity. "Great," indeed, and without controversy; "great is this mystery of Godliness—God was manifest in the flesh." And, beholding his glory, the believer may well exclaim, with the apostle Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"

Behold him in the character of Mediator; one, the only one, qualified to interpose between parties so remote from each other, as the holy Jehovah and guilty men. He is fully qualified, inclined, and authorized, to make up the breach. Yea, he has actually made reconciliation for iniquity, by the sacrifice of himself; for with his righteousness God is well pleased; and through him pardon and eternal life are freely proclaimed to all, and even the chief of sinners are invited to receive them.

Consider, likewise, the gracious offices and characters which he sustains, and which render him precisely what we want to make us happy. We are ignorant; he is the great Instructor; "he teacheth to profit," and "none teacheth like him." We are guilty; "his blood cleanseth us from all sin;" and, washed in that blessed fountain, we are "whiter than snow." We are rebellious creatures; he brings us back to God, makes us willing in the day of his power, and we become his humble and faithful subjects. He is a Prince, to govern and protect us from all our crafty and powerful enemies, who lie in wait to destroy. We need a friend; Jesus is that Friend—a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother; whose compassion and fidelity render him the best friend we can possibly find. We want a Counsellor; He is our Advocate, and will be our Guide in every difficulty; for he has promised, that if we acknowledge him in all our ways, he will direct our paths. We are diseased, and ready to die; He is the great Physician, who is ready and able to restore us to health. We are poor;—He "counsels us to buy gold of him," and then are we rich indeed; rich towards God, and rich for ever.

Jewels are prized by vain mortals as ornaments. Wearing them is a mark of distinction, for inferior people cannot

obtain them; and thus the wearer excites notice and admiration in the gay circles of the great. This may be thought a pitiable weakness, when poor vain mortals value themselves on a profusion of sparkling stones; but he who possesses the Pearl of great price, is adorned indeed: he that "puts on the Lord Jesus Christ," surpasses an angel in splendour; like the church, in the vision of St. John, he may be said to be "clothed with the sun;" and thus he becomes truly honourable; to "for them that believe he is precious," or "an honour." Dignified indeed, beyond expression, is he who possesses this Pearl of great price!

In the days of superstition, precious stones were sometimes worn as amulets, or charms, to protect the wearer from divers diseases and mischiefs. We know of no such virtue in earthly jewels; but we assert that Christ is the *true Amulet*; and if we "bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus," nothing shall by any means hurt us:

"We shall be safe; for Christ displays
Superior power, and guardian grace."

Now, if Jesus Christ possesses all these excellences, (and the one half has not been told you,) and if the soul that obtains an interest in him will be thus benefited, it is no wonder that the wise merchant, discovering his inestimable worth, should be willing to sell all that he hath, for his sake.

He is found; and blessed is he who has found him. In the parable of "the treasure," which precedes our text, it is represented as, "hid in a field;" not obvious to the eye of the careless and inattentive traveller: and pearls are generally procured from the bottom of the ocean; so that he who finds the one, must dig for it; and he who gets the other, must dive for them. The blessings of salvation escape the notice of the careless and the carnal; but "he that seeks shall find." Here, then, in the word of the gospel, is this mighty treasure to be found. It is the business of the minister of the gospel to display this treasure,

to proclaim its value, and to invite his hearers instantly to seek it; but it is the office of the Holy Spirit alone to lead the seeking soul to obtain the prize; it is his gracious business to glorify Christ; and this he does by "taking of the things of Christ, and showing them to men."

When this discovery is once made, then holy and earnest desires will arise in the soul, or rather *this* desire—this one desire, swallowing up, as it were, all the rest; so that he who once was used to say, "Who will show me *any* good?" now cries, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me!" He who once was used to say, "I see no form nor comeliness in him wherefore I should desire him," now exclaims, "He is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." He who, when formerly invited to the gospel-feast, "desired to be excused," now "hungers and thirsts after righteousness." "Yea, doubtless," says the believer, with holy Paul, "I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; and count them" (all things) "but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him."

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in thee I find."

But how is this pearl to be obtained? It is to be bought: "he goes and sells all that he has, and buys it." We are not to strain the metaphor, as if it were to imply that, by any valuable consideration whatever, we can merit this inestimable treasure: the meaning is, that the christian gives such a hearty and decided preference to Christ, above all worldly things whatever, as to be willing, if need be, to part with them all, should they stand in the way of obtaining his grace, his righteousness, and his salvation: and, indeed, to say the truth, there are some things which must be parted with. That good opinion, for instance, of ourselves, which we are too apt to entertain; that dependence we are prone to place upon a religious education, upon freedom from gross vices, upon our goodness, virtue, sincerity, charity; these must be parted with. Our own

righteousness must be accounted as filthy rags, if we would wear the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Sinful indulgences, of whatever description they may be, must also be given up. This splendid jewel would look ill upon him who is covered with the deformity of sinful practices: and however dear these indulgences may be, and though the parting with them may be painful, as the plucking out the right eye, or cutting off the right hand, it must be done. We must "crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts;" and those who are Christ's are willing so to do.

Reputation must not seldom be forfeited, in consequence of our attachment to Christ, his cause, and his people. If we cleave to Christ as we ought, we must separate ourselves from the world; and if we do so, we shall find, by experience, the truth of our Lord's saying, John xv. 18, 19, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." Protected, as we happily are, by the laws of our country, from the hand of violence, on account of our religion, yet there is no power upon earth that can screen us from the reproach of the cross. Men will "speak evil of us," but let it be "*falsely*, and for Christ's sake."

And shall we not be willing to bear reproach for Him who "made himself of no reputation" for us? Shall we not readily part with our reputation, and "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach?" Fear it not; it should rather be esteemed a jewel that adorns us. The cross of Jesus is our best ornament: God forbid that we should glory in anything except in that cross!

In the times of persecution, not character only, but liberty and life itself, were forfeited. Our Lord most candidly told his disciples upon what terms they must become such, that they must be willing to part with father and mother, wife and children, houses and land, and to be hated and persecuted by all; and to take up their cross and follow

him, or else they could not be his disciples. Nor did they think the purchase too dear. Did they refuse the terms? By no means. Like Moses of old, they "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt." The apostles of our Lord, when evil entreated, "departed from the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ;" and "they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that in heaven they had a better and more enduring substance."

IMPROVEMENT.

To conclude: You have heard the character of the wise merchant; and do you not approve of it? Did he not act judiciously? Is not gain the proper object of a tradesman? and who blames a man for making a good bargain? Now say, Is this *your* character? What is your chief object, the object of your warmest desires, and that for which you are ready to part with all? Is it the world? Alas! it is vain! Make it not your portion; it will deceive and disappoint you. Even now it does not afford you satisfaction; but think, O think of the solemnities of a dying hour! Think of that awful period, when you shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. I ask, What *then* will profit you? What, but Christ? Then, every soul will be ready to say with the martyr, "None but Christ! none but Christ!" I demand, Why do you not say so *now*? Why should not that be *now* the language of your hearts? Not waiting till the horrors of death and the dread of judgment shall extort it. O let me entreat you now, even now, to turn away your eyes from beholding vanity; and such will all terrestrial objects prove. Behold this great and glorious object, JESUS, with his great and eternal salvation, is set before you. How are you disposed towards it? Perhaps this may be the last time that ever this gracious Saviour may be thus presented to you, or that you may be affectionately invited to regard and receive him. If you reject him now, perhaps he will be for ever rejected. How then will you

decide? Do you esteem him or not? Methinks, angels pause to witness your answer, and report it in heaven. Be persuaded to take the advice of Jesus, especially you who are young: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things" (needful for life and for godliness) "shall be added unto you."

It may be that you are seeking; and, perhaps, you may be seeking in sorrow; but fear not, the Lord hath said, "He that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth;" and the wise man, to whom I before referred, who not only knew the vanity of the world, but also the excellency of true wisdom, says, "If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding, if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." The Lord giveth wisdom; he has promised to give it to those that ask it, and that liberally; and are you really willing to part with anything, to part with everything, that stands in the way of your enjoyment of Christ? If you were suffered to retain only one thing in the world, what would that one thing be? I can readily answer for every true believer,—It would be Christ. "Let everything else go," he would say; "give me Christ, and that is enough."

But, perhaps, you are discouraged at the terms proposed. The text directs you to make a purchase; and when you contemplate the infinite value of the Pearl in question, you say, I can offer nothing in the least degree valuable. I *have* nothing; I *am* nothing; I can *do* nothing. How can I presume to purchase the Pearl of great price? You say truly. You have indeed, as was before observed, no valuable consideration to offer; but let not this discourage you. In another Scripture resembling this, wherein the blessings of the gospel are compared to food and drink of the richest quality, and sinners are invited to come and purchase them, the terms run thus: "And he that hath *no money*, come *ye*: yea, come, buy wine and milk, *with-*

out money, and without price," Isa. lv. 1; which is as much as to say, "You shall be welcome to these great benefits, though utterly unworthy of them." Accept them as God's free gifts, and be content to be for ever indebted to grace, only saying, "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!"

Finally; How rich and how happy is the believer in Jesus! We congratulate our friends when they have made a prosperous voyage; or when, in the course of Providence, an addition is made to their wealth; but oh how much rather is a child of God to be congratulated! "I know thy poverty," said Jesus Christ to the church of Smyrna; "I know thy poverty, but thou art rich." They were poor in this world, but they were rich in faith; rich towards God; and if thus rich *now*, how will the glorified believer be enriched! This jewel will retain its value and its lustre beyond the grave, and will enrich and adorn the soul for ever and ever; yea, a brilliant crown of glory awaits every believer in Jesus. God grant that this may be our final happiness, through Jesus Christ; Amen.

COLLECT.

THANKS be to God for the unspeakable gift of salvation! We bless thee, O Lord, that thou hast so loved our world as to send into it thine only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but should have everlasting life. With him thou freely givest to us all things richly to enjoy. On them who walk uprightly, thou bestowest, for his sake, grace and glory; and withholdest from them nothing that is good. While many say, Who will show us any good? O Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. That shall rejoice us more than all increase of earthly enjoyments. May we then press on toward the mark to obtain the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus. May we lay aside every incumbrance, and our most easily besetting sins, that we may persevere in our race, looking unto Jesus, who for the joy set before

him, endured the pain and the disgrace of the cross. May we choose for our portion that inestimable treasure, which every one that seeketh findeth, and which alone can ensure to us everlasting satisfaction. May we count all things but loss for Christ; that living and dying he may be our gain; our life, our peace, our joy unspeakable, even now; and our glory for ever. Amen.

JESUS, I love thy charming name,
'Tis music to my ear;
Fain would I sound it out so loud,
That earth and heaven might hear.

Yes, thou art precious to my soul,
My transport and my trust;
Jewels to thee are gaudy toys,
And gold is sordid dust.

All my capacious powers can wish
In thee most richly meet;
Nor to my eyes is light so dear,
Nor friendship half so sweet.

Thy grace still dwells upon my heart,
And sheds its fragrance there:
The noblest balm of all its wounds,
The cordial of its care.

I'll speak the honours of thy name,
With my last labouring breath;
Then speechless clasp thee in my arms,
The antidote of death.

DODDRIDGE.



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