

The Priceless Pearl

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[0 : 00] I've been speaking to you about mysteries. Now there's no mystery when the Springboks lost to New Zealand yesterday morning.

Well, it was a mystery when Argentina beat Australia yesterday. But that's not the mystery I'm talking to you about today. I'm talking to you about the mystery of the kingdom of God.

Because the kingdom of God is a mystery indeed. And we do not understand it because the kingdom of God is working in a realm which we can't touch or feel.

We can't see it. We can't actually manipulate it in any way. It is God working through his spirit in our world in ways which we do not think of and cannot even begin to understand.

And that is what I'm talking about today. The Lord Jesus Christ gave us many indications of how mysterious the kingdom of God really is.

[1 : 00] And I spoke to you last week. I gave you the illustration of that missionary story of how strangely God worked in that particular instance. And then I spoke to you last week about the man who found a treasure unexpectedly.

And how unexpectedly he discovered that he was wealthy because he was able to buy the field. But he had to pay all that he had to buy the field. And he became wealthy because he discovered a treasure.

And that treasure was discovered unintentionally by him. He didn't know he was going to discover that treasure. And that treasure of course is the Lord Jesus Christ. And so the Lord Jesus Christ often reveals himself within the kingdom of God as the kingdom of God operates in our world.

There are people who come across the gospel, the treasure of Christ, unexpectedly. And their lives are changed. But now I want to talk to you about the next verse that the Lord Jesus Christ taught us.

And it's completely different again. And so this is what the Lord Jesus teaches us in Matthew 13 and in verse 46. He says in verse 45 and verse 46.

[2 : 15] He says, Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for false pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Now last week I told you about a man who wasn't looking for anything but he found it. But this week I want to talk to you about people who are searching. And now in this instance the Lord Jesus Christ tells us somebody found it.

Now you know in Jesus' day people lived very much like we do today. Except of course they didn't have the modern conveniences. But they did the things that we do. They meet each other. They fall in love.

They arranged weddings. They got married. They had children. The children had to be schooled. They had to go to the marketplace. They had to find work. They had to plow their fields. And they had to reap their harvest.

They had to also live under a government that was oppressive for them in many ways. People lived their lives. And they had to survive and adapt just like we have to do in our lives today.

[3 : 21] And they were all looking for something themselves. And Jesus tells us about them in the Gospels. There were some people who came to him who felt that they'd found everything.

That they had everything and done everything right. But they hadn't yet found that one important thing. Like that rich man who came to Jesus and said I've kept all the commandments. But please tell me how can I have eternal life.

And so he lived in that world. He lived in that world where people did their best. Some of them.

Some were bad people. Some were good people. Just like in our world today. And there are people who don't care about God.

And people who don't care about church. But there are other people who do feel that there's something missing. They can't put their finger on it. Maybe you're one of those people. Maybe you woke up this morning and you regretted yesterday.

Maybe you woke up this morning hoping that you could somehow wipe out the years of the past. Maybe you woke up this morning saying well I've done my best. But I still feel there's something more.

[4 : 20] And I don't know what it is. And I don't know how to get it. And you would be placed amongst the category of searchers. But you don't know that you're searching. You're just longing for something.

And you don't know what you are longing for. Somebody wrote these words on one occasion. He said you are looking for the answers to the question of life.

Lots of reflecting about what has been and gone. Looking at the here and now. Wondering what is ahead of you. You've been guided by your own guides.

They will light up your way and show you the path ahead. Now of course there was this man who wrote these words. He had the right idea that there are people who are searching.

But he was completely wrong when he thought our own guides were going to lead us to the truth. Completely wrong. But that's all the knowledge he had. And that's what most people have today.

[5 : 15] Even the cleverest of people who reject God. They eventually thrown back upon themselves. They say I have got to find the way. I've got to find the satisfaction. I've got to find the answer.

And the trouble is they can't. And you can't. And I can't. No, no we can't. We may search for it. We may long for it. We may know there's something there. But we ourselves can't find it.

Somebody else wrote that they felt like a gypsy inside. Always searching. You know gypsies are people who don't have homes. That's where they lived in caravans in Europe. And they traveled around.

And they moved around as a nomadic people around the whole of Europe. And so this man wrote. He said he feels like a gypsy. Always searching for a home.

And feeling lonely instead. So it's against that background that Jesus told these two stories of these two people. The one man who without meaning to walked across a field.

[6 : 11] And stumbled against the treasure. And he found the treasure. And some people stumble against it. Some people stumble over it. Some people bump into it. And then they say to themselves.

Wow. This is what I've been looking for. And so they discover that if they want it. They've got to give over everything. They've got to leave everything behind. And they get the treasure. And their lives are changed forever.

Then Jesus told another story. About a man who wasn't walking across a field. A man who wasn't living an unconcerned life. But a man who was very concerned. And a man who was truly searching.

And Jesus told the story about this man. And here it is. He said again. The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value.

He went away and sold everything he had. And he bought it. So what Jesus was talking about. Was this man. His stories always had relevance to the people.

[7 : 09] They would have understood. That some people were dealers. In various goods. And Jesus was talking about a dealer in jewels. There were many of them around in Jesus' day.

And they were merchants. They were the merchant class. Doesn't mean they were rich. It just meant that that is what they did for a living. They went around buying and selling goods. Or looking for goods. They could bring home to some headquarters.

And sell. And this man was a merchant. And he was looking around for fine pearls. And so here was this merchant. An ordinary guy like you. Like me.

An ordinary person. Trying to do what it was right to do. Trying to make a living. And his chosen occupation. Was that of being a merchant. And his chosen product. Was that of looking for jewels. That was his product. He sold. Bought and sold jewelry. It was a very big thing in those days. To do that. And pearls. Were a very important item. On any merchant's list.

[8 : 05] They didn't value diamonds then. Like they value diamonds today. Pearls were the great thing. In those days. And so here was a man. Who Jesus said. Went looking after fine pearls.

Now. You must remember that. Jesus said he was searching for fine pearls. He wasn't looking for that which was fake. He wasn't looking for that which was cheap. He wasn't looking for that which was easy to get.

You know. There are lots of people like that today. In the realm of religion. They're willing to settle for the fake. They're willing to settle for that which is less than the truth. They're willing to go to churches where no gospel is heard.

They're willing to listen to these TV people. Who tell you all sorts of false things. They're willing to do all of that. But here was a man who was looking for fine pearls. He was looking for something that was real and true.

And genuine. And he wasn't looking for those things that could palm off quickly on other people. And make a quick profit. He wanted a fine and a genuine pearl. And that's the sort of jewelry he dealt with.

[9 : 06] And one day Jesus said he finds one of these pearls. We don't know where he finds it. Maybe at some merchant place. Maybe in some marketplace. Maybe somebody who doesn't really have access to the wider markets.

But he's got this incredible pearl that the man finds. And he sees it. And immediately the pearl grabs his heart. The pearl touches him.

He says this is it. This is what I've been seeking for all my life. I've been seeking for this particular pearl. And here it is. Before me.

And he responds to it. And how does he respond? Exactly like the man who found the treasure that I spoke about last week. He had to go back and sell all that he had. But he acted decisively.

He didn't wait. He didn't say let me just sit down and think about this now. And weigh up this and weigh up that. And what will my wife say? And what will my father say? And what will so and so say?

[10 : 03] No, no. He said here it is. I've got to be decisive about it. So decisively he makes up his mind that he's going to obtain this pearl. But to do it he's got to sell all that he's got.

So all that he's got has got to go. And so he goes to buy the pearl. And the pearl he's bought. And the pearl becomes his. Now we know that that is the story that Jesus told.

It's what we call a parable. It contains within it great spiritual truths. So what was Jesus really saying? Well of course the pearl that Jesus is talking about is the same as the treasure in the previous verse.

It is Jesus himself who is the pearl of great price. That's the person that we're all longing for. We don't know that of course. Very often people wake up in the morning longing for something. They may have everything but they're longing. They're saying there must be something more to life. There must be something more. There's something in me. I have a soul. And my soul gets hungry.

[11 : 05] My soul is longing for something. I'm not like my pet cat and dog. You know happy with a sauce of milk or a bowl of pellets or whatever the case is.

My soul wants something that I can't put my finger on. And so that is what they're looking for. They're looking for the pearl of great price. And who is the pearl?

It is Jesus who is the center of the kingdom of God. And so amongst all the secrets that Jesus told about the kingdom of God. There was the centerpiece all the time.

The piece of the treasure. The piece of the pearl. He is the center of the kingdom of God. And people who want to get to heaven have got to pierce through all of their previous mythologies. And they've got to get to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the pearl of great price that you need, that I need, that we all need so that we can get to heaven.

[12 : 03] Now the merchant that Jesus spoke about of course is the seeker. And as I said you may be a seeker yourself. And as I said to you a moment ago, you may wake up regretting something from yesterday or something from your past life.

You may be like that gypsy I mentioned who says to herself, I'm looking for a home but I can't find a home. All I've got is this terrible loneliness that grips my heart and grips my soul.

You know I got a phone call one day while I was sitting in my study. And a man I've never met before in my life and who lived a thousand miles away phoned me.

And he said to me, are you Bishop Tiff? And I said yes. And he said, please help me, help me. I need a home, I need a home. I need a home. And his voice got higher and higher and higher.

He said, please help me. I need a home. And I of course didn't know what in the wide world he was talking about. And I thought that he was a homeless person who was phoning me perhaps.

[13:06] He'd taken drugs or drink, whatever the case is. So I began to say to him to look, go, go, go come into a church and find someone. And I'm a thousand miles away. I can't help you. No, you don't understand.

He says, I have a home. I've got my own property. I've got a place to go and sleep. And I'm not looking for a bed. I'm looking for a home for my soul. That's what he said to me.

A home for my soul. A man from a thousand miles away actually phoned me to ask me where he could find a home for his soul. His bed didn't satisfy him. His property didn't satisfy him.

His wealth didn't satisfy him. Nothing satisfied him. His soul cried out in such agony that he phoned some minister he had heard of to ask, can you help me to find a home for my soul?

And so I was able to talk to him about the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, it's a very interesting thing how people long for the Lord Jesus. They don't always put it that way, of course.

[14:06] They don't always explain it in that way. They don't know it themselves. They can't actually verbalize it or articulate it.

But that's what they're looking for. They're looking for a home for their souls. You know, there's a man that we are told about in the Old Testament, a wise man, a wealthy man, a man who was thinking that he lived in an age before the Lord Jesus Christ came.

And so in the book of Ecclesiastes, we read these words that this man has written. He said, I thought in my heart, come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.

But that also proves to be meaningless. Laughter, I said, is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish? I try cheering myself with wine and embracing folly, my mind still guiding me with wisdom.

You see, your own guides guide you wrongly. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for me to do under heaven during the few days of my life. I undertook great projects.

[15:17] I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees.

I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold myself in the treasure of kings and provinces.

I acquired men and women, singers and a harem as well, the delights of the heart of men. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this, my wisdom stayed with me and it was all nothing.

My friends, you see, there are people today who are looking for things that will never, never bring them to that point where they'll be able to say, God belongs to me.

Heaven belongs to me. I have hope for the future because they're looking in all the wrong places. And so the merchant that Jesus told about represents all the souls of people, all the souls of men and women in the world today.

[16:22] He represents all the searchers, all of those who wake up in the morning saying, please help me, help me to find what I really need for my life. He represents all the longings of all the human hearts.

He doesn't even know that he's longing for the right thing, but he's longing, he's longing for something that's going to satisfy him. When he finds it, he'll know it.

But that's the great thing about the secret of the kingdom of God is that when I talk to you about the kingdom of God, you can say, oh, you're talking nonsense, man. I've got my own views.

But when the Holy Spirit comes, here's the mystery. Suddenly you see that my views are right and yours are wrong. What changes you? Here's the mystery of the kingdom of God.

It's the power of the Holy Spirit you can't see or feel. It changes your heart and says, I've been wrong. I've been wrong. I need to turn to that great pearl of great price.

[17:18] And so this merchant was looking for the pearl. Then comes the big moment when the seeker finds the pearl. This merchant finds his pearl. And maybe it finally dawns on you that Jesus is the one whom you need.

It may be like that. You know, Jeremiah, the prophet said in chapter 29, verse 18, you will find me when you seek me with all your heart.

You know, there are some people who come to church to seek God, but not with all their heart. They seek God because there's trouble. They seek God because they've got some problem. They seek God because somebody's persuaded them momentarily.

But they do not seek God with all their heart. And maybe it's the with all your heart part that is missing from why you feel the way you feel today. But if you pray and seek God with all your heart, Jeremiah says, you will find him.

And so the big moment came for this merchant where he sought the pearl with all his heart. And suddenly he found it. But the next thing I want to point out to you is that when he found it, there was a hitch.

[18 : 28] And the hitch was this, that the pearl was very expensive. The pearl, you can't just pick up and say it's mine. The pearl isn't free in that sense.

You know, some people have acted like that toward the Lord Jesus Christ. Put up the hand in the meeting, come forward, take a little booklet or something, go off and live their life. Don't even read the little book.

Don't pray again. Just be moved momentarily in the service. That's all. It's been a little bit of a sentimental moving. And that's all. That's never going to get you to heaven.

Never. No, no. There is a price to pay if you want to find the great pearl or the treasure. And so it's going to cost you all you have in terms of your pride.

You know, your pride keeps you. My pride keeps me from heaven more than anything else. My pride says I am not bad. My pride says I'm not that bad.

[19 : 29] My pride says I'm not as bad as the other guy, like the man in the temple who spoke about the tax collector. He said, Lord, I thank you I'm not like other people are. I do this and this and this and this and I'm not even like this tax collector.

The tax collectors were absolutely disapproved of in Israel in those days. Pride will keep you out of heaven. You brag to your wife. No one needs to tell you what to do.

You know the Bible backwards. Or to your husband. You know the Bible backwards when you really need to know it frontwards if you want to find the pearl of great price. And you know there are many, many people today whose pride keeps them from the pearl of great price.

That stubbornness. That personal nastiness. And just the refusal to obey God and to bow the knee to almighty God. But the hitch is you cannot get the pearl unless you come to take the pearl on the pearl's conditions.

You can't get the treasure unless you take the treasure on the treasure's conditions. You can't just pick up the pearl, pay a few pence for it and say, this is mine. You can't do that. You can't come to the Lord Jesus Christ and say, wow, I see it now.

[20 : 44] Now, Lord, now you are mine and I'm going to follow you. No. You can't do it like that. You can't do it like that. No, this man had to do something, you see, to obtain that pearl.

He had to go home and he had to sell everything he had to obtain his pearl of great price. Just like the man who found the treasure. And you know, my friends, if you want the Lord Jesus Christ, you have got to turn back and repent of every single thing in your life that has kept you from God through all these years.

You've got to turn back and repent of it. Of your pride, you've got to go back and apologize to your partner. And all the things you've done wrong, you've got to put it right as far as you can.

You can't just come to the pearl and the treasure and say, now you're mine. Yes, you will be forgiven. Yes, you will be accepted. Yes, you will be wanted and loved by the Lord Jesus Christ. But if you come to him, you've got to take up your cross. You've got to take up your cross and follow him. And maybe there's someone sitting here today, you're wondering why it hasn't worked for you.

[21 : 59] You've done all that. You've prayed the prayers and you've asked Christ, but you haven't repented. It's only been a piecemeal commitment to Jesus. You've committed this to Jesus and that to Jesus, but you haven't done the hard thing.

You haven't gone and done the real thing that you need to do to put things right and then to come to him and ask for forgiveness. And so perhaps that's what's got to be done for you.

Now, I just want to ask this last question this morning. Why is the pearl so costly? And why is the pearl so valuable? Why do you have to sell everything to go and get the treasure?

Why do you have to get rid of everything to go and get the pearl? Why is that? Why do you have to turn back on yourself and reject all that is of your own heart so that you may receive the Lord Jesus

as your savior?

Why do you have to do that? To do that, my friend, I need to take you by the hand to Calvary's hill. I need to take you to the cross with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[22 : 58] I need you to hear the thud of the hammers of the Roman soldiers as they knock the nails into Jesus' hands.

I need you to see them pulling the cross upright. I need you to see his bones all ripped out of joint. I need you to see that. I need you to take you and to stand before him to see the broken and the beaten, bloodied body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I need you to see him in his suffering there. I need you to hear the people mocking him. He said he was the son of God. If he was, let him come down now and we'll believe him. They can't see, you see, the unseen cords that are binding into the cross, the love for your soul and my soul.

I need you to be there when the darkness comes. I need your ear to hear the cry of the Lord Jesus when he said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

That was the moment. That was the moment of moments. The moments of all eternity. The moment of the cosmos. When the guilt and the burden and the punishment of sin was placed upon those, that innocent heart, that innocent soul.

[24 : 15] And the Lord Jesus Christ descended into the punishment that was ours, mine and yours. Because we are the sinners, not him. But he went there in our place.

When you see the Lord Jesus Christ dying for your sins, when you really understand it and then rising again from the dead. When you see his humility.

When you see his obedience to God. When you see his love for you. When you see him surrendering himself in your place on the cross and then rising from the dead. Then you will see why the pearl is so costly.

Then you will see why the Lord Jesus Christ is the pearl of great price and the treasure in the field. And then you will say, why for such a savior who left the glories of heaven to come to me?

Of course I must give up everything. Of course I've got to go and say sorry. Of course I've got to turn my back on my old life. Of course that's a small price to pay.

[25 : 18] So that I might have the savior of the world. Forgiveness of sins. And hope for the future. Then you will see why the pearl is such a pearl of great price.

You know it's so interesting. In the Bible we're sometimes told of people who reject and reject and reject and then come. To the Lord Jesus Christ. And then we are told of other people who are searching and searching and searching and find him.

How is it that somebody who rejects Christ can suddenly be turned to somebody who is seeking him? See there's the mystery of the kingdom of God.

It can't be done by the preacher. It can't be done by magic. It is done by the power of the Holy Spirit that you cannot see who's part of God's working in this world.

The kingdom of God is a kind of a big name for all that God does in this world. And maybe that's you today. I'll end with this little story.

[26 : 27] You know one day at St. James we had an evening service. And there in that evening service there was a lady who had come because a friend had moved in next to her.

A woman who went to St. James moved in next to her and began to witness to her. And she was very, very anti. Very, very, very clear. You know a very bright personal, professional person.

And she was quite pregnant. You know the two came to church that night. She agreed for that night. It was a guest night that she'll come for that one night to church with her. And when they sat in the pew and it was almost the front pew like here.

This is what I said at the end of the service. I said if you do not want Christ then will you please tell him. You don't want the pearl of great price.

You don't want the treasure. Don't tell me. Tell him. But if you do then you tell him. I said I'll pray two prayers. One for you who don't want him.

[27 : 34] And one for you who do. So I started the first prayer and I said oh God. I don't want you. You pray after me. I don't want you. I don't want your gospel.

I don't want your savior. I don't want forgiveness. I don't want you to bother with me. Pass me by. Pray that prayer. And then I said but for those of you who do.

Dear Lord please accept me tonight. I'm lost. I'm hopeless. And without you I'll never be saved. Forgive my sins. Take me into your family.

And then I closed the service. And the two ladies in front of me. The one lady who was pregnant. The guest. The anti-lady. Was weeping. And finally her friend could console her no longer. And they were short of counselors that night. And so I went down. I sat near. I was worried. I thought perhaps something got wrong with the pregnancy.

[28 : 37] So I sat next to her. And I said to her. Can I help you? What is wrong? Do you need help? Do you need to get home? Is there a problem? And she said. There is. She said. There is a problem.

I became a Christian tonight. That's the problem. She said. When you prayed that first prayer. I prayed every line with you. And I said. God please pass me by. I had no right for him. To listen to anything else. I said. But when you prayed the second prayer. Something turned within my heart. And I prayed for Jesus to become my savior. And I know he's done it. And now I'm a Christian. And she burst into tears. How can that happen? How can a thing like that happen? And for months she came to witness in our church. Before she and her husband relocated. How can that happen? Only by the power of the Holy Spirit. The secrets of the kingdom of God.

[29 : 38] She found the pearl of great price that night. And when she found the pearl of great price. God gave her the ability. To put her trust in him. You see.

All of our searchings. And all of our findings. Are all superintended. By our sovereign God. Jesus tells the parables. From a human point of view.

But there's a heavenly point of view. Where God sovereignly guides our footsteps. To the cross. So have you come to the cross this morning? Have you found the pearl of great price? And if you have found him. Do you love him every day? Do you spend time with him? Or has he lost his glitter. For you. And you're beginning to backslide.

Today dear friends. I ask you please. Come back to the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not let go of him. And if you're not sure that you have him. Make sure this very day.

[30 : 40] Your pastor's back from leave. He's here. I'm here. There are others here. Who will be glad to talk to you. And above all. The pearl of great price himself.

Is here. Today. He wants you. To come and talk to him. Now let's pray. Father. We thank you for this glorious and wonderful.

Truth. That on the one hand. In your great sovereign purposes. Some people. Bump into you accidentally. And. On the other hand. Some people who are searching.

Search and search. And then suddenly. By your grace they find. We pray that tonight. Today. We may come to you as one. Who is found. And that we may accept you.

And receive you. The pearl of great price. And never be the same again. For Jesus sake. Amen.