
The Costliness of Possessing Christ

By David Wilkerson

April 28, 2003 Matthew tells us Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables: "All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 13:34-35).

To many Christians today, the parables sound very simple. Yet, according to Christ, each parable holds an incredible secret. There's a hidden, kingdom truth in every parable Jesus told. And that truth is discovered only by those who diligently seek for it.

Many believers skim over the parables quickly. They think they see an obvious lesson and quickly move on. Or, they dismiss a parable's meaning as not applying to them. So they turn to Paul's writings instead, seeking "deeper truths." They want a theology that's laid out for them clearly and expounded in detail.

But I think of two parables Jesus told his disciples. In my opinion, these parables contain perhaps some of the most profound truth any believer could lay hold of:

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

You may think, "What's so hidden about these truths? We all know Jesus is the pearl of great price, the treasure buried in the field. That's no great secret." I tell you, there's hidden manna in these two parables. And only a handful of believers have discovered it. Why? They've never taken the time to dig as the man in this parable dug. Indeed, these two desperate figures - the digging man and the dogged merchant - make Jesus' meaning clear: God's secrets must be desired above all else in life.

The Bible states clearly there are secrets of the Lord: "His secret is with the righteous" (Proverbs 3:32). These secrets have been unknown from the foundation of the world. But Matthew tells us they're buried in Jesus' parables. These hidden truths have power to truly set Christians free. Yet few are willing to pay the high cost of discovering them.

Now, we all know the gift of salvation is free. Jesus paid the price of our salvation in full, for all eternity. "Being justified freely by his grace" (Romans 3:24). Moreover, he invites us to drink from his ever-flowing fountain of grace: "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17).

I witnessed the joy this grace brings when I preached in Italy recently. Thousands poured forward to accept Jesus in those meetings. These people didn't just recite a sinner's prayer, but prayed in depth, weeping, confessing, calling on the Lord. They were being freely saved and delivered by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Yet, in his parable of the sower, Jesus warns that not everyone who confesses him will continue on in faith. According to the parable, some seed (the gospel) will fall on good ground. That seed will take root, grow and bear fruit. But other seed will fall on stony ground and wither before it can develop roots. And still other seed will fall on thorny ground, and Satan will quickly rob it.

I believe the great falling away Jesus prophesied is taking place. A terrible apostasy is overcoming masses of believers, especially in charismatic circles. Many are turning aside from convicting, soul-stirring preaching to seek teachers who please their flesh. They've been deceived by what Paul calls "another gospel, another Jesus." Their ears itch to hear teaching from money-focused prosperity preachers.

We saw this happening during our crusades in Europe. Italian Christians told us of American evangelists who emptied people's pockets, hopped onto their private jets and said, "Ciao, goodbye!"

Yet Jesus foresaw all these things. He looked down through history to our time, and predicted everything that would come: the rejection of godly reproof, the rise of a gospel of ease, the shallow teaching of flesh-pleasers, the falling away of multitudes. Indeed, he warned that in the last days, the love of many believers would wane. Once-zealous servants would grow lukewarm or even cold. And they would turn Christ's costly grace into lasciviousness. They would preach of his forgiveness and blessings, all at no cost to anyone. People would be put at ease in their sin. And it would so grieve the Lord, he said he would spew them out of his mouth.

This is why Jesus called a private session with his close circle of disciples. Scripture says, "Jesus sent the multitudes away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field" (Matthew 13:36). Jesus wanted to open his followers' eyes to the deeper meanings of his parables. He knew they needed truth that would carry them through times of great seduction.

In this closed meeting, Christ told the two parables I mentioned earlier, about the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price. These two parables take up only three verses of the Bible. Yet embedded in them are the Lord's secrets, which he said were hidden from the foundation of the world. And they contain his eternal purposes, to be revealed to his devoted servants.

With just a quick study, using Bible commentaries, it's possible to mine nuggets of truth from these parables. But that's not all Scripture says we're to do. Jesus described a man who digs desperately. And if the truths of God's kingdom are buried deeply in Christ's parables, we too must dig diligently to find the revelation.

I ask you: who's willing to labor hard to find these secrets? Who will wait patiently on the Lord to reveal his secrets to them? Who'll tarry with the Holy Ghost long enough to lay hold of his life-giving truths?

I believe I've tarried over these two parables just long enough to get an inkling of the truth hidden in them. I can say this about them: they're about the costliness of possessing Christ. Many Christians go through life satisfied with just enough faith to get by. They want only enough of Jesus to make it to heaven. They may mine some practical truths from his parables, but they never find the life-giving truth buried deep within them. By contrast, these two parables tell us Christ's precious truth is found only by hungry, devoted seekers. Those who pursue him with their whole hearts will have their eyes opened fully to the secrets of abundant life.

Jesus begins these two parables by saying, "Let me tell you what the kingdom of heaven is like" (see Matthew 13:44). Christ isn't speaking here of heaven as we think of it, the realm in glory with the Father. No, he's referring to the kingdom of heaven on earth. He's saying, in essence, "Here's how you can possess the fullness of heaven in your heart, right now. But first let me tell you what it will cost

you to obtain it."

How do we obtain heaven on earth? The two parables make it clear: by possessing Christ in all his fullness. And that is a costly endeavor.

1. The first parable is about the treasure in the field. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field" (Matthew 13:44).

First, I want to ask, what does the field represent here? It signifies the Christianized world. It's every area where the gospel has been preached and received. Of course, the church is a part of that field. There is a home mission field and a foreign mission field. And the man laboring in the field represents everyone who serves Jesus.

This man has learned from a reliable source that treasure is buried somewhere in that field. Likewise today, we've been told, "Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). While other field workers labor halfheartedly, this man starts digging furiously. He spends hours, days, weeks doggedly looking for the treasure.

Who is this man? He represents every devoted servant who's heard what the prophets spoke of Jesus: "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 13:35). This man doesn't care what others think of him. He has set his heart on unearthing God's hidden treasure. And he knows the only way he'll find it is to seek it with everything he's got. So he digs and digs, absolutely bent on locating it.

What's the treasure he's looking for? It's the incredible discovery that Christ is all he needs. His treasure is knowing that all joy, direction and purpose, indeed, the very riches of heaven, are his in Jesus. It doesn't matter what trials and tests confront him. He knows that in Christ, he's been given every resource. Jesus is his all in all.

When this man finally finds the treasure, he does a curious thing: he immediately hides it. "Which when a man hath found, he hideth" (Matthew 13:44). What's he doing here? Why would he hide this wonderful, newfound wealth?

We find a clue in Paul's testimony. The apostle tells us, "When it pleased God, who separated me...and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood; neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia" (Galatians 1:15-17).

Paul had been given an incredible revelation of Christ. So, why did he choose to keep it secret? It was because this treasure was absolutely precious to him, dearer to him than anything. You see, Paul had fasted for this truth, prayed for it, sought it diligently. He'd served God with zeal, as a Pharisee, but without knowledge of the truth (see Romans 10:2). And now that he'd found the truth that was Christ, he wasn't going to be robbed of it.

So Paul went to the desert of Arabia to hide his treasure. In essence, he was "selling everything he had to buy the field where the treasure was buried" (see Matthew 13:44). Paul was declaring, "I don't want anybody or anything to sidetrack me from this great truth I've found in Christ. I don't want to hear anyone else's opinion about it right now. I've got to possess it for myself. And I will share it with

others only after I've understood the full magnificence of what I've found."

I picture the field worker in the parable marveling at the treasure he found. Once he opened the chest, he held up his treasure, examined it, rejoiced at it. Yet, immediately, he sensed that handling it and gazing at it were not enough. He told himself, "I must have this. I've got to possess it totally. If I do, it will see me through to my dying day."

Paul is an example of those who have discovered the priceless treasure of a heart-revelation of Christ. He dug deeply, found the treasure, and was overjoyed at his discovery. Yet he hid it deep within his heart. He was saying, "It's not enough for me to merely admire Jesus or marvel at him. I need him living inside me. I've got to have him as my very life. I don't need any more theology about the Savior. I've spent a lifetime learning doctrines. My one focus now is to know Christ and possess him. I want Jesus to live through me, and for my old self to die."

When Jesus says the field worker "sellet" all he had, the Greek meaning is to trade or barter. This signifies an exchange of goods or services without the passing of money. In other words, whatever is being sought can't be bought.

This opens up the meaning of the parable even further. Jesus is saying, "You can't buy spiritual things with material things." Paul lived out this truth. He owned nothing but the clothes on his back, and perhaps some tools for tent-making. Yet here's what it cost Paul to lay hold of his treasure: "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ...I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Philippians 3:7-8).

Who buried the treasure in the field? Our Creator Father possesses all things. And he owned the field where the treasure was buried. This means he was the one who buried it there. Now, he knew that the man digging in the field was poor. After all, rich men don't need to do manual labor. So, this field worker had to come to the owner and barter to buy the field.

We know we can't buy spiritual things with money. So, how is it possible to buy something from our blessed Father? Isaiah answers: "Come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1). In other words, God is saying, "What's it worth to you? Don't think in terms of money, however. Talk to me in terms of goods and services."

Over the centuries, rich men have tried to gain eternal life by giving up their wealth. They forsook castles, lands, riches, vast herds, jewels and fine clothing, all in an effort to win Christ. They became paupers, eating meagerly and wearing animal skins. But Jesus was never found this way by anyone.

I believe Paul spent his months in Arabia bartering with the Father. I picture him asking, "Lord, how can I possess the full riches of Christ? What's it going to take?" The Father answers, "I'll tell you, Paul. Give me all your self-righteousness. Then I'll give you the righteousness of Christ. Give me all your good works, your strivings to please me. And I'll give you Christ's holiness by faith alone.

"Surrender to me all your goals, ambitions, plans, hopes. I'll give you Christ himself to live in you and through you. His desires will become yours. And you'll know joy and happiness that no accomplishment could ever give you.

"Give me the best of your time. Give me all your trust and confidence, all your concerns. Then you'll

win Christ. You will have possessed his wisdom and intimacy, all without money. Tell me, Paul, is winning Christ worth all that to you?"

Paul did win Christ. He emerged from the desert in full possession of his treasure. Now he testified, "The old Paul is dead. And Christ is alive in me. All my ambitions are gone. Everything I wanted to do or be before, I've left behind in the desert. I've found my life's treasure, and he's all-sufficient for me. Jesus is all I will ever need."

You may ask, "Where's the hidden mystery in this parable of the treasure? What secret is buried there?" Paul gives us the answer: "The mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26-27).

In short, the mystery is Christ himself in you. The very treasure of heaven is living within you, possessed by you.

2. The second parable is about the pearl of great price. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matthew 13:45-46).

Who is the merchant in this parable? The Greek root here explains him as a traveling wholesale trader. This merchant was also an assayer, or tester. In other words, he made his living by evaluating costly pearls for their quality and worth.

Now, we know Jesus is the pearl of great price that the merchant finds. He's very costly, of incalculable value, because the merchant sells all his other possessions to gain him. My question is, who was the original owner of this costly pearl? And why would he be willing to part with it?

I believe we find the meaning of the pearl in God's eternal purposes. Obviously, the pearl belonged to the Father. He possessed Christ just as any father possesses his own son. Indeed, Jesus is the Father's most valued and treasured possession.

Only one thing would cause the Father to give up this priceless pearl. He did it out of love. He and his Son had made a covenant before the creation of the world. And in that covenant, the Father agreed to part with his Son. He gave him up as a sacrifice, for the purpose of redeeming humankind.

The apostle Peter refers to the high price of this precious gift. He speaks of the costly blood of Christ, our pearl of great price. Yet, when the chief priests examined this pearl, they valued him at merely thirty pieces of silver. "They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value" (Matthew 27:9). Think of it: the God of the universe had made his precious pearl available to all. Yet these men put little or no value on him. Some even called him a fake, an imitation.

I tell you, the Lord must grieve today to see how little value his people place on this priceless pearl. To some, Christ is no more than a museum piece. He's placed under glass, unavailable to be touched or handled. People visit him once a week to admire him or praise him. They gaze at his cross and marvel at his sacrifice, saying, "What beauty. How utterly glorious." But they never own the pearl. They don't barter with the owner, determined to possess it at any cost.

Beloved, God intends his pearl to be found by those who are obsessed with possessing him. It's as if he's saying, "My pearl is available only to those who place a great value on him."

Thus, the merchant in this parable represents a very small band of believers today. These servants have found in Jesus the answer to every need and cry of their hearts. He has become the central focus of their lives. They've set their hearts to go after this prize with everything in them. And they're going to lay hold of him, at any cost.

What did it cost the merchant to obtain the pearl? Remember, this pearl was priceless. It couldn't be bought with any amount of money. There simply wasn't enough gold or silver on the earth to match its worth. And the merchant knew this. He realized he could spend his whole life amassing wealth to obtain it, but his efforts would all be in vain.

I picture the merchant telling the owner, "Look, I've got to have that pearl. I'll gladly barter my entire lifetime of services to you. Whatever you ask of me, I'll do. Just let me possess it." The Father lovingly answered him, "Give me your heart. That's the cost." Next we read, "When he had found one pearl of great price, [he] went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matthew 13:46).

This merchant sold his very soul for the pearl. It cost him his mind, body and spirit, "all that he had." Yet the owner told him he would gain this in return: "Yes, you'll be my bondservant. But you're going to be much more than that to me. You see, by giving me your heart, you're letting me adopt you. I'm about to make you part of my family. Then you'll be my heir. That means you'll own the pearl with me. It will be both mine and yours."

Let me tell you what these two parables mean to me personally. Christ is the treasure chest in the field. And in him, I've found all that I'll ever need. To me, that means the following:

No more trying to find purpose in ministry. No more looking for fulfillment in family or friends. No more needing to build something for God, or to be a success, or to feel useful. No more keeping up with the crowd, or trying to prove something. No more searching for ways to please people. No more trying to think or reason my way out of difficulties.

I've found what I'm looking for. My treasure, my pearl, is Christ. And all that the Owner asks of me is, "David, I love you. Let me adopt you. I've already signed the papers with my own Son's blood. You're now a joint heir with him of everything I possess."

I'm still in the process of selling everything I have. I'm still giving the Father my time, my thoughts, my will, my plans. Yet I know I'm exchanging it all for treasure. I'm trading it in to buy living water, the bread of life, the milk and honey of joy and peace. And I'm doing it all without money. The cost to me is my love, my trust, my faith in his Word.

What a bargain. I give up my filthy rags of self-reliance and good works. I lay aside my worn-out shoes of striving. I leave behind my sleepless nights on the streets of doubt and fear. And in return, I get adopted by a King.

Dear saint, this is what happens when you seek the pearl, the treasure, till you find him. Jesus offers you everything he is. He brings you joy, peace, purpose, holiness. And he becomes your everything: your waking, your sleeping, your morning, afternoon and evening.

So, what is he worth to you? To gain him, it may cost you more than you've been willing to pay. I urge you: start digging today.

Copyright/Reproduction Limitations: This data file/publication is the sole property of World Challenge, Inc. It may be printed in its entirety for the reader's personal use or to pass on to family and friends. It may not be altered or edited in any way and all reproductions of this data file/publication must contain this copyright notice. This material is not to be posted or transmitted publicly/electronically on any Web site, Web page or FTP site other than: worldchallenge.org, davidwilkerson.org or tsculpitseries.org

© 2003 World Challenge, Inc., PO Box 260, Lindale, Texas 75771