

I.N.I.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
July 15, 2018
Matt 13:44-52

In Christ Jesus, who is the Treasure sent from the Father for all of mankind, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

What would you count as your most prized possession? Sometimes prized possessions change with age. When I was a boy of about 8, my most prized possession was a baseball signed by all my baseball heroes: the Milwaukee Braves—Hank Aaron, Eddie Mathews, Warren Spahn, Lew Burdette. When I was in College it was my first car, a 1961 Chevy Nova. Prized possessions can range from souped up sports cars to gun collections; from jewels to grandmother's wedding dress. What makes these things prized possessions can be because of whom it was from; of whom or what it reminds us; or the value of the object itself.

And all three of those points is why we hear in our sermon text this morning that our

MOST PRIZED POSSESSION IS THE GOSPEL.

The Good News of Jesus Christ is most prized and precious because of whom it is from (our God); because of whom and what it reminds us (Jesus and His sacrifice for us); and because of the value of the object (forgiveness and eternal life, worth more than all the silver and gold in the world).

This morning we are discussing three parables. The first two speak directly about the value of the Gospel and the effect it has on the life of believers. How precious that message of salvation is! The third parable speaks of the gathering of all people on Judgment Day warning both unbelievers against hypocrisy and believers against going through the motions of Christianity.

At the very end of our text, there is a fourth little parable which teaches us about the purpose and effect of training in God's truth which applies to all of us. Again our theme is:

THE GOSPEL IS YOUR GREATEST POSSESSION

We probably all agree with that statement but unfortunately how often do we all live that statement. Do we live as Christians with this in mind that the Gospel, the Good News of our salvation through Jesus Christ is our Greatest Possession? We don't when we neglect coming to hear it preached. We don't when we ignore God's Word sitting closed on our shelves. We don't when we fail to study it in Bible Class, Sunday School, Confirmation or our Christian Day School. We don't when we don't speak that Word to others and share its contents. We don't when we don't give of our offerings to have that Word spread around the world.

Let's see from our first two parables just how valuable this Gospel message is and what an effect it has on people. Jesus says in vs. 44: "**AGAIN, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE TREASURE HIDDEN IN A FIELD, WHICH A MAN FOUND AND HID; AND FOR JOY OVER IT HE GOES AND SELLS ALL THAT HE HAS AND BUYS THAT FIELD.**"

The man who found the treasure in the field was so impressed with its value that he was willing to give up everything he had in order to buy that field and secure that treasure. He recognized what it was worth and was willing to sacrifice everything to obtain it. The Gospel's message of salvation is like such a treasure. Nothing is more precious! Nothing is more valuable to a person with a burdened conscience, one weighed down by his sin than these words: **YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN!**

When we are confronted with the horror of our sins and the just punishment of damnation that we deserve; when our souls are led to see the miserable selfishness of our thoughts, words and deeds and we see how we sometimes treat those closest to us so badly; when we realize that God in His justice should say to all of us **GO TO HELL YOU SINNERS! DEPART FROM ME!** but then we instead hear the Good News that God loves us and has sent His Son to die for us and that Jesus having taken our place has put us into a right relationship, a perfect relationship with our Father; **what greater treasure can there be!**

I, a selfish, self-centered, condemned sinner have been redeemed, have been set free, have

been justified! That message will become the most important thing in my life. The knowledge of and the appreciation for that forgiveness, life and salvation will dominate and take control of our lives.

The second parable is similar to the first. A merchant looking for exquisite pearls finds one of great price and sells all that he has and buys it. He recognized how unique and precious that pearl was. Since man's fall into sin there has been an emptiness in people. Because of sin, human beings are separated from God. There is something lacking in their life. The natural knowledge of God and man's conscience tells him there is someone out there that they are accountable to and there is that uncomfortable feeling of owing a debt while searching for the one to whom the debt is owed.

And that is one reason why people of every era, of every corner of the globe, have had a god or gods whom they worshipped. One great philosopher said, "If there were no god, man would invent one." And that is exactly what unbelieving mankind does. Even mainline Christian denominations have become spiritually bankrupt by rejecting the Bible as the sole source of divine truth and authority and rely on their own reason and philosophies.

What has taken the place in the hearts of some people is Eastern religions, cults, existential beliefs all claiming divine authority, all claiming to have the ability to fill that emptiness, that void in your life.

Some others turn to the material things of this life to fill the void, while others see the futility of material things and they try to fill the void with a religion of works, social activism. But none of these things can bring true lasting peace, happiness and life.

Only when the Holy Spirit has led the individual to the Gospel is his life complete. If you know of anyone who has lived most of his or her life in unbelief, apart from the Good News of Jesus and now has been rescued from that empty way of life to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, they can testify that their emptiness is now filled, their searching is over. The precious, free gift of eternal life, peace, joy and happiness is alone found in the Good News that God the Father has done it all through His Son our Savior. That peace and joy can not be found anywhere else but in the Gospel message. This treasure of salvation makes every other message pale in comparison—it is indeed **THE PEARL OF GREAT, INESTIMABLE PRICE!**

Being led to find that pearl by the Holy Spirit's work through that Gospel message is a life changing experience that puts everything else into its proper perspective. May we recognize the Gospel's value to us and treasure its worth, by giving of our time to read it, to hear it consistently, to study it, to learn it, to meditate on it, to make it our daily companion.

Our third parable shows us the results of possessing this treasure. We read vs. 47-50 **"AGAIN, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE A DRAGNET THAT WAS CAST INTO THE SEA AND GATHERED SOME OF EVERY KIND, WHICH, WHEN IT WAS FULL, THEY DREW TO SHORE; AND THEY SAT DOWN AND GATHERED THE GOOD INTO VESSELS, BUT THREW THE BAD AWAY. SO IT WILL BE AT THE END OF THE AGE. THE ANGELS WILL COME FORTH, SEPARATE THE WICKED FROM AMONG THE JUST, AND CAST THEM INTO THE FURNACE OF FIRE. THERE WILL BE WAILING AND GNASHING OF TEETH."**

People of Galilee knew what Jesus was talking about with this net. It was thrown out into the sea and dropped down to the bottom. When it was dragged up it scooped up and caught all the fish in the area encompassed by the net. Since these nets were large they would catch all kinds of different fish—fish for which the fisherman were not even trying to catch. So when they would bring the full nets to the shore their job was to separate the good fish from the bad; the edible from the inedible; those which could be sold on the market from the worthless and valueless.

The net is the Gospel. It is cast out into the world and catches many people within it. It draws people into God's kingdom. But not every one who comes into contact with the Gospel or who hears the Gospel really believes it. Not everyone in a visible Christian congregation may be a believer in Christ. There may also be hypocrites—bad fish—ones who are worthless in God's eyes because they have no faith and therefore are still dead in their sins.

What a warning this parable is to all of us. Are we Sunday morning Christians—worshipping for one hour a week, and then living our life as if we had never heard of our Savior's love and

forgiveness and His will for our lives? Are we make-believe Christians, going to church because it makes us look good to others? Is our Christianity a sham, our repentance hollow, our faith and trust insincere? On Judgment Day all will be exposed. The Lord will see the believers from the unbelievers just like the fisherman separates the good fish from the bad fish; and those who have not repented of their sin and have not believed in Jesus as their Savior will be cast into outer darkness, into the fires of hell, into eternal torment where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Make no mistake about it; this place exists for all eternity. This third parable therefore contains the warning to us to make use of the time of grace that God has given us, by constant use of His Word.

When Jesus was done speaking these three parables He asked His disciples a very important question: **"HAVE YOU UNDERSTOOD ALL THESE THINGS?"** Remember the purpose of a parable—to reveal spiritual truths to believers and to conceal those same truths to Jesus' enemies. The disciples said that they did understand. So Jesus speaks one more little, mini parable to them in vs. 52: **"THEREFORE EVERY SCRIBE INSTRUCTED CONCERNING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE A HOUSEHOLDER WHO BRINGS OUT OF HIS TREASURE THINGS NEW AND OLD."**

Do you know what Jesus means by these words? Let's read them again: **"THEREFORE EVERY SCRIBE INSTRUCTED CONCERNING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE A HOUSEHOLDER WHO BRINGS OUT OF HIS TREASURE THINGS NEW AND OLD."**

The Jewish leaders of Jesus' day were not well equipped. They were more concerned with what **THEY** had to say than what **GOD** had to say in His Word. They were more concerned about the laws, rules and regulations than the message of grace and forgiveness through the coming Messiah. But the disciples were being well prepared. They had been given a treasure out of which they could bring whatever was needed for the occasion—whatever was needed to meet every need. They had the promises of the Old Testament concerning the coming of the Messiah and now they were seeing the fulfillment of that promise in the person of Jesus. They were hearing and seeing things never heard and seen before. They were being shown these things and being taught these things so that they too would be able to teach and show others, to bring this message of salvation through Jesus to all of mankind.

And we now have that in this book: the Bible—both the Old and New Testament. Through His Word, Jesus has also trained us. This training equips us for Christian living, Christian witnessing, Christian serving to others. As disciples of Jesus we will be eager to learn more and more of this Word to gain an ever deeper understanding of God's love for us and Jesus' sacrifice for us. We will learn from the Gospel so that we too can reach into our storehouse of Scriptural knowledge and be prepared to speak to others and apply the Word to every opportunity that our Savior lays before us.

By the time I got to college the ink on that prized baseball had faded so badly I couldn't even read the names of those childhood heroes of mine. The ball is long gone. I don't even remember when I lost it. That '61 Chevy was a treasure for awhile. Started in the cold Eau Claire winters every day, but it too got old and I sold it and it has long since rusted away. So much for worldly treasures.

But the Word that I was taught as an 8 year old, the Word that I heard and learned in College is the same Word that I read and hear today. It is the treasure that has brought me, my children and my grandchildren to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

This Gospel message is the same treasure that has worked upon your hearts as well and will be your greatest treasure in life and in death. As disciples of Jesus we will be eager to learn more and more and to gain an ever deeper understanding of this Truth so that we too will be able to bring out of this **TREASURE THINGS NEW AND OLD**. We will want to learn more so that we will be prepared for every opportunity that our Savior lays before us. Christian training prepares us to share this precious message of the Gospel with others.

God's Word a treasure is to me, Thro' sorrow's night my sun shall be, the shield of faith in battle. The Father's hand hath written there my title as His child and heir, "The kingdom's thine forever." That promise faileth never.

Amen.