

# WHAT WE LEARN FROM A PEARL!

## Steps to a New Life:

Matthew 13:44-46

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Bethany Church

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Some years ago a young couple found out their preschooler's life was threatened by an inoperable brain tumor. It was cancerous. Radiation might arrest it, but there was no assurance it would remove it. Also, the treatment would lead to disfigurement. The part of the body radiated would not grow with the rest, so one side of the face would never match the other. The parents were desperate. They got their church praying. They got our church praying. We held a 24-hour prayer vigil for the child. They got anybody from any religion, Christian and non-Christian, praying. They wanted all the help they could get. When I heard that, an uncomfortable feeling gripped me.

Most of us can identify with that kind of desperation. We want to exhaust all possibilities to preserve the life and health of our loved ones. As a result, there are all kinds of alternative therapies people pursue. Far be it from me to stand back and criticize a couple whose daughter teeters at the precipice of death. I don't want to be in that situation. Nevertheless, it is important to ask, "How much of that desperation is simple love for the child and how much is fear driven by unbelief that Christ can't or won't do anything?" I'll tell you why I ask this.

Those who study the Bible a good deal recall that in the Old Testament the people of Israel got into trouble frequently because of idolatry. Although the people continued to offer sacrifices to Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, they also explored alternative solutions to their needs. They'd worship in the temple, but then burn incense at their homes to another god. Now that might seem foreign to us, but listen. Suppose you lived then, and while raising your children, some become ill. A neighbor offers an herbal potion that could help. You apply it to their chests and the children improve. When you discuss their recovery with them, they mention the potion came from a sacrifice made to the hill-god who governs this territory. One day a child of yours becomes deathly ill. Since these neighbors helped you before; you are inclined to consult them. They tell you that the hill-god spared their child from death when they burned incense in their child's room. Soon you find yourself burning incense to a hill-god as well as offering sacrifices to Yahweh. You still want to identify yourself as children of Abraham and please Yahweh so you embrace many religious rites. At the same time, you find yourself exploring a whole different world of spiritual power. Can you understand the seduction?

Now let's put ourselves in the place of Yahweh for a few moments: We made the world. We made everything in the world. We made humanity in our image. We love humanity and give them dominion over the earth. We gave each human the right to seek us or reject us. However, the world is far more complex than they understand. We made spirits or angels to serve us and them. Some rebelled. They want to rule the world, and they do rule by deceiving human beings. They gain prominence by deceiving humans and by receiving their allegiance. They have no love for humanity. They know that humans are the rightful rulers of earth and so they are bent on using and destroying them. With their deception they obliterate knowledge of us. They pretend to be gods using their knowledge of creation to deceive and enslave the

vulnerable. Therefore, we called Abraham and his children out of their deception to be a revelation to the nations of what's possible in a relationship with us. We did mighty works and we gave them instruction inscribing it in stone and putting the sign of this relationship in their flesh. Although we were in covenant with them like husbands responsible for the protection, provision and fulfillment of their wives, they sought their protection, provision and fulfillment elsewhere. Consequently, the covenant became their curse. It made them doubly liable. Not only did they walk in deception; but they did so in betrayal and defiance of our covenant with them. They were no longer a blessing and a light to the world. They were a stumbling block. Their behavior suggested we are impotent, unreliable and uncaring.

Now that we've entertained both perspectives, let's consider Jesus' words. When Jesus discussed with his disciples the sorting out of believers from non-believers at the end of the age (Matthew 13:36-43), he gave us the pivotal factor. He compared the kingdom of heaven to a secret treasure that a man came across walking in a field. Seeing its value, he stowed the treasure back in the field, collected everything he owned, everything he valued, everything that was dear, every trinket, every treasure, anything that would generate money – nothing was spared – and sold it. Then he bought the field and with it the treasure that would provide all he needed. Now the man had need of nothing else.

How different is this picture from that of the Israelites who faithfully offered sacrifices at the temple but burned incense to other gods? How different is this picture from the couple who wanted people from every religion to pray for their child?

Where do you turn for protection, provision, restoration, wisdom, and life? The Apostle Paul wrote:

***Christ Jesus... has become for us wisdom from God-that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*** (1 Corinthians 1:30, NIV)

Jesus said, ***“I am the way, the truth and the life”*** (John 14:6); he said:

***I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.*** (John 6:35, NIV)

In the context of who believes and who does not, who is wheat and who are weeds, who is good fish and who at the end of the age is sorted out as rotten, Jesus told one more parable. He spoke of a pearl merchant. When this merchant found a pearl of great value, he sold all his other pearls, his land, his buildings, everything he owned, and bought the pearl. Now he would become famous. He would be identified not merely as a pearl merchant but as the custodian of this stunning, valuable pearl. It would be his calling card, his identity, his life and his legacy. He would be known by the pearl.

Jesus taught that God is looking for people who will be known by the pearl. They reveal to the world the relationship that makes all the difference for humanity. That is what Christ was teaching his disciples. Jesus is that pearl. The welfare of all humanity hinges on their relationship with the one and only God. Who reveals that? Only those who have obtained the pearl at the cost of everything they possess!

The pearl teaches us that the new life people need (and often seek and search for) is dependent upon an exclusive trust and focus on Jesus. He is your understanding. He is your hope. He is your trust. He is your treasure. He is your pearl. If not, you are looking else where for salvation and life. Understand, however, that Jesus will not disappoint. Repent of other trusts, other hopes and look to Jesus. Call on him. Embrace his work in the body of Christ. Let him change you and lead you. He is worthy of all your trust.