

What is your most treasured possession you own? When I recently visited my grandsons, they had a lot of toys, but the 4 ½ year old, and 3 year old definitely had a treasured possession. Everett had Mrs. Rubble and Fletch, two stuffed creatures. The 3 year old had Bunny CoCo. Those boys would carry those animals in their arms when they went to bed at night, and when they got up for breakfast. When I was a kid I had Pandi, a stuffed Panda bear with one eye. It was my most treasured possession. What about you? What one item do you value that you possess that you would say is your most treasured possession?

Once you have identified what your greatest treasure is, what do you do to protect it? Some of us may have a Simply Safe Security System. Others of us may have a safe in our homes. The safe has a blanket over it, with a lamp on top of it, so no one would initially recognize it was there. In that safe, you have gold bullion coins and silver dollars. You are preparing yourself for the time when the US dollar is worthless. When you hide something like gold coins or silver dollars, it is not because you don't want others to be able to buy these items and own them themselves. But you are hiding them, so that you yourself, don't lose that treasure. You hide it for your own security. In our lesson for today, we have the kingdom of heaven described as a hidden treasure.

So we are going on a treasure hunt today. No metal detectors required. Our Detector is the Bible. Let's turn it on and begin the hunt. Consider: "A Treasure Better Than A Stimulus Check!"

You might think another \$1200-2400 check from Uncle Sam is great. But puff, its gone. Jesus says, I have something better. It's a pearl. If you take a pearl today and put it in your hand, you will observe just how perfect it appears to you. While the skilled lapidary has to saw and grind and polish other stones to bring out their colors and to make them sparkle and shine, the pearl dare not be touched. To try to improve upon it, is like trying to add color to the rainbow or beauty to a rose. It simply cannot be done because the pearl is already perfect. And its moonlight whiteness makes it a perfect picture of purity. Can we not see in this another reason why Jesus chose the pearl as an emblem of salvation? What is more perfect than the salvation that Christ has earned for us on the cross? Who can add to it? Who can improve upon it?

A devout Christian who for many years was a member of the kingdom of God had a friend who was an unusually gifted artist. His paintings, as far as the human eye could discern, were perfect. The composition was just right, his colors harmonized, his emphasis on the object of interest was heightened by his wise omission of many distracting details. But with all his merits as an artist, he lacked the one thing needful. He was not a Christian. He did not have the pearl of great price. Often his friend spoke to him about the Savior's complete and perfect work of redemption, but the artist always felt that he himself had to do something too, that he had to add his own good works to the work of Christ if he wished to be saved. One Christmas the artist gave his Christian friend one of his paintings. But instead of being grateful, he criticized the picture. He said, "I think that you should add a tree here and another bush there. Put some more rocks in the foreground and an old stump in the center.

Somewhat angered the artist replied, "If I did that, it would spoil the picture. Anything added to that picture will not improve it but ruin it. Why don't you accept the picture just the way it is?"

Just so it is with God's plan of salvation, replied the Christian friend. Christ Jesus has done it all. His suffering and dying on the cross paid for all of your sins. You cannot improve upon His work no matter what you do. Why don't you accept God's perfect salvation just as it is?"

If you, my friend, wish to improve upon God's plan of salvation by your own good works, your own righteousness, your own goodness, then you are trying to add purity to the pearl, luster to its moonlight whiteness; then you are trying to grind it on your own clumsy, uneven, and rough grinding stone. With Paul, we need to learn to say, "By grace I am saved through faith, and that not of myself: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest anyone should boast."

Oh, think what it cost God to give us this pearl of great price, this salvation in Jesus Christ. In this too there lies a resemblance in the pearl. Other precious stones are found on land, or in rocks, or in river beds. As a rule, no danger is connected with obtaining them. But consider the dangers of the ancient pearl divers! Without modern diving equipment or oxygen the pearl diver at the time of Christ would take a deep breath and with a heavy lead weight in his hand, would plunge into the dangerous waters below. But sometimes, instead of the diver coming to the surface with a gleaming pearl in his hand, and a pearl-toothed grin, his own blood would rise to the surface of the sea, his body having been attacked by a shark or some other sea animal. Thus, Jesus, in obtaining for us the pearl of great price, fought with all the monsters of the deep pit of hell, and his holy precious blood, poured out on the cross earned salvation for us. O wondrous love that the Son of God should shed his life's blood on the cross to purchase the pearl of great price for us. How we should value this pearl above all else. That is exactly what this merchant did.

We have here before us today, not just an ordinary souvenir hunter. This person was not just on the lookout for some gem to put in his curio cabinet. This was a pearl merchant. That was his life's work. He sailed the seven seas in search of pearls. Distance meant nothing to him. Unusual pearls did. And when he saw this pearl, his eyes fairly popped. This pearl was perfect. He had to have it. He reaches into his pocket, takes out his pouch of precious stones-flashing diamonds, blood red rubies, fiery opals, sea green emeralds- and pours them all out in a heap before another pearl trader. What a bargain the one pearl trader thinks and exchanges his one pearl of great price for the entire bag of inferior jewels. Both pearl traders go their way congratulating themselves on their shrewd deal and each thinking how foolish the other one was.

Is not this man who sold the pearl of great price for a whole sack of inferior gemstones a picture of countless people today who have no real purpose in life? Instead of having one aim, one love, one purpose, one treasure, one Christ, one God, they have a whole raft of inferior, time-consuming, time-wasting, purposeless aims and interests.

One man makes his object and aim in life the accumulation of wealth. How he toils till late hours in order to make more, to get more, to add more to his pile. He neglects his wife, friends, children, his church, his Bible, his God, his prayer life just to have more time to acquire material things. But the appetite keeps growing with the eating. He can never fill his bottomless bag. The more he gets the more he craves.

Another believes that his happiness will be found in one round of social activities after another. He must fill this engagement and that, be here, be there. But when he takes time to contemplate, to think things through, he finds that his life is empty, shallow,

filled with nothingness`s. He too has exchanged the pearl of great price for a lot of inferior stones.

Still others believe that happiness consists in throwing off your inhibitions, casting all restraints to the wind. To them getting drunk is a legitimate pleasure, gambling is good sportsmanship, loose morals are the spice of life. But in the end they too find that this kind of life brings nothing but heartache, sorrow, remorse, shame and a feeling of guilt. What dime-store pearls they have exchanged for the pearl of great price.

My friends, only in oneness is there peace and beauty and happiness. A man may have twenty inferior pictures on the walls of his home; far better would it be for him to have just one good one to which his eye can ever travel and find beauty and rest. The merchant who bought the pearl of great price knew the value of unity, of oneness, of a single, all-consuming purpose in life. He knew that salvation, full and free in Christ, would satisfy all his wants. Unlike other things that satisfied only a small corner of his nature, this would satisfy him completely.

What is your greatest need and mine? Let's face it. The one thing that you and I want most of all is to have our sins removed, our guilt taken away. We want to be free from that terrible feeling of shame and guilt. And even more, we want sin no longer to have the rule over us. WE want to throw off the dictatorship of sin that dominates our wills and makes us willing tools of Satan. And it is only the pearl of great price that can do that. It is only God in us, ruling our spirit, guiding our lives, that can effect this change.

Furthermore, this pearl of great price is a permanent possession. Fortunes may dwindle. Poor men may be made millionaires, and millionaires into paupers. Health may be lost never to be regained. The passing years slowly sap the strength of you with its beauty of face and figure. The resonant voice of the opera star cracks, the skillful hand of the artist becomes clumsy, the violinist loses his sensitive touch, the keen-minded scientist loses his sharpness. But as Paul says, "Neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Accidents cannot rob you of this. Sickness cannot take it away. Unfaithful friends cannot deprive you of it. Even death cannot wrench it out of your heart.

And don't think that if you follow Christ, it means the end of all your fun. Non-Christians will say, "I don't want to be a Christian because if I do, I'll have to give up all the things I like best." The pearl merchant never regretted the fact that he gave up all his lesser inferior gemstones for the one great pearl of great price. He was now extremely happy. Yes, he did give up certain things, but he got back far more. The teenage boy doesn't mind if you take away his bicycle and replace it with a Harley. So the person who gives up his former sinful pleasures or his bad habits or his scattered way of life and lives for Christ, never complains about what he has given up. He doesn't complain because his heart is now changed, and the very things he once loved are the very things he now has no desire for.

Today, you may be looking forward to another \$1200 from the government. But that is just fiat currency. Worthless paper. But you have in your hand, a Pearl, the Pearl of Great Price. Always treasure it, guard it, and be thankful for it.