

A Pearl of Great Price

Hello Dear Listeners:

Are you interested in obtaining an inheritance? There are probably some who would shrug their shoulders when faced with that question. Perhaps they're quite satisfied with what they have. They don't look for anything they might gain beyond today. There will be others who don't even think of tomorrow. In their opinion there is no heaven and no hell. So why bother with a future and an inheritance which for them is no more than a dead end?

But then there are those who would eagerly grab whatever good might come their way. For, if in this life they say, there is nothing but death and taxes you might as well "*Eat, drink, and be merry*" while you can.

When Jesus was on earth however he did not teach such a morbid perspective on life and death. He began his ministry with this message, - "*Repent for the kingdom of God is near*" (Matthew 4:17). In fact the kingdom of God is at the very heart of Jesus' message. More than a hundred references to God's kingdom are scattered throughout the preaching and teaching of Jesus in the gospels. Even in the time between his resurrection from the dead and his ascension into heaven the gospel-writer Luke says, "*Jesus appeared to the disciples over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.*"

When you read the letters of Paul (to name only one apostle) you quickly find that this kingdom of God figured prominently also in what he said and wrote.

Now the last three times on this program we've concentrated on what are called "*the fruits of the Spirit*" in Galatians 5. There we came across Paul's warning to those who insisted the Galatian Christians stick to Jewish ceremonial laws . That insistence led many to live a life of shameful immorality, discord and envy. No wonder for they failed to "live by the Spirit" and by God's grace alone. Solemnly Paul warned them, " These who live such sinful lives will not inherit the kingdom of God."

The bible shows us that the kingdom of God is the rule of an eternal, sovereign God over all the universe. That's clear even in the Old Testament, for example in Psalm 103:19. "*God has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.*" Even that heathen king Nebuchadnezzar had to declare, "*His (God's) kingdom is an eternal kingdom.*" ¹

Yet, many of you will know that one of the petitions o what is known as The Lord's Prayer, says, "*Your kingdom come.*" That indicates God's kingdom is not yet complete. That simply is because God is still at

¹ Daniel 4: 34

work with people, moulding their hearts, calling them to repentance and having them grow in the knowledge of His power and his care for Christ's church. Besides the devil is still around and he has a kingdom of his own which Jesus Christ has laid waste in principle with his victory on Calvary's cross. Yet that dark and sinister evil kingdom will be utterly destroyed at Christ's second coming.

When Jesus Christ came on earth the kingdom of God came very near to people. For he would show himself to be king. All authority and heaven and earth would be given to him (Matthew 28:18) The kingdom of God is found in the hearts of those who submit their lives to Christ Jesus. When they pray "*Your kingdom come*" they ask the Lord to rule them with his Word and Spirit so that they submit to him more and more. ²

I hope it is clear that seeking God's kingdom must be a most important concern of a person's life. Those who defy God's authority and refuse to submit to Him are not part of the kingdom of God. Yet those who acknowledge the lordship of Christ and gladly surrender to God's rule in their hearts surely have a wonderful inheritance in and of his kingdom.

² See Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 48 which has an explanation of the second petition of the Lord's Prayer.

In more than one parable which Jesus taught, He laboured to show some of the riches of his kingdom as well as the necessity to pursue those riches.

In Matthew 13 there are a number of parables including one called the parable of the hidden treasure (ch 13: 44) as well as the one about *the pearl of great price*. I'd like to concentrate on the latter for a few minutes.

In v. 45 Jesus 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 bought it.

Evidently there is a still-existing oriental profession of travelling jewellers who deal in precious stones and pearls and who travel great distances seeking to make advantageous purchases. Some have been known to find a very valuable gem and in order to obtain it, sold all their possessions in order to possess it. Someone has said that in this regard the jewellers of the east as a body are perhaps the greatest travellers in the world.

Pearls are still in high demand today and some are of great value.

Recently an item appeared on a newscast of what may be the world's

largest pearl. Found ten years ago in a giant clam and kept as a good luck charm by a Philippine fisherman³this pearl weighs a whopping 34 kg and is more than 65 cm long and 30 cm wide.

Now pearls are formed when clams and oysters and other mollusks coat an intruding grain of sand with calcium carbonate. Successive layers end up producing a beautiful iridescent jewel for some fortunate lady to hang around her neck!

Jesus spoke of a merchant-man⁴ who was on the hunt for “goodly pearls”. Surely he represents those citizens of the kingdom who are willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of obtaining the prize of the kingdom of God.

While a natural pearl is formed around a very small ‘intruder’ a grain of sand or some other minute object inside the body of a mollusk, there is a similar building around a different ‘seed’ in the heart of a person. That ‘seed,’ as the bible shows in more than one place, is the word of God. When it falls into the fertile soil of a heart opened God’s Spirit, it takes root and is built up and comes to maturity through the work of that Spirit. It’s an amazing process that goes on during one’s whole life.

³ such giant clams can weigh up to a thousand pounds.

⁴ the original meaning

That Word of God was proclaimed by the apostle Paul in many places. O yes, it was rejected by man while others tried to coat it with manmade philosophies which were intended to rob that word of its power.

Now here we are and here is God's Word. It is the same today as it was in the days when Jesus himself declared it, as did his servants the apostles and earlier, the prophets. This Jesus Christ says to you and me, "*Seek first the kingdom of God and all the material things you need to live will be yours as well.*"⁵

May we do so! May the church, which Christ placed at the centre of his kingdom not be neglected. May you too be joined to that church where Christ Jesus has established it and where that word is faithfully proclaimed. May you be joined with those who fight what the bible calls "The good fight of the faith"⁶

In this way, of the Spirit! shunning all evil thoughts and useless opinions and praying that in the coming of God's kingdom in glory the works of the devil may be utterly destroyed. Amen and thanks again for listening.

⁵ paraphrase of Matthew 6: 33

⁶ 1 Timothy 6:12; 2Timothy 4:7

