

SESSION 1: THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Matthew 13:10-17, 45-46; John 14:6; Philippians 3:7

QUESTIONS

1. When you hear the word “parable,” what do you think of? How do parables help us to learn more about God?
2. What is something that is precious to you (i.e. a relationship, a possession, etc.)?
 - a. What value does it add to your life?
 - b. How do we recognize that something is valuable?
3. In the parable, the merchant was **actively** seeking pearls. How could this point from the story have relevance in your life?
4. What are some things in your life that are keeping you from going all-in for the kingdom of God?
 - a. How can you go about getting past those obstacles?
 - b. How can making the kingdom of God first in your life change you?
5. There is a big difference in knowing that we are rich in Christ and living a life that demonstrates that knowledge. How do we make evident the riches we have received from Jesus Christ?

[illegible]

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

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Parables are stories that illustrate a moral or spiritual truth. They use realities of life that people can understand to teach concepts that are hard to grasp with only words and language. Jesus often used parables to teach God's truth to those who were willing to hear it. However, as Jesus says in Matthew 13, verses 10-17, He knew there would be people in the crowds who weren't yet ready to hear these truths about God and His kingdom. For the faithful who understood it, parables helped to comfort and reveal the truth; while for others, the truth remained a mystery.

Further along in Matthew 13, we find the parable of the pearl. Jesus teaches, *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful 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). Let's unpack this a bit.

It's important to understand the value of a pearl in biblical times. Pearls were considered to be one of the most precious of gems. From a practical point of view, it makes sense that the merchant in the parable would sell all that he had to buy the pearl. Jesus knew that the disciples and the others listening to Him would at least understand this literal side of the parable.

But to truly see what Jesus was teaching here, we need to understand what the pearl represents. Jesus sets up the parable as describing what the kingdom of heaven is like, when we will see Him face to face. However, it would not be accurate to say that the pearl itself represents the kingdom of heaven. The entire parable, from the merchant going out to seek pearls, to finding one pearl of great price, to selling all that he had to buy that pearl – all of these actions combined, the entire story, describe the kingdom of heaven and the process of seeking it. So what is Jesus telling us about the kingdom of heaven? In order to enter the kingdom, we must seek something - something so valuable that we are willing to sacrifice everything for it. If we are represented by the merchant, what then is this pearl that we are looking for? It is Jesus Christ!

Jesus Himself, tells us in John 14:6, *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.* To come into the presence of God, into His kingdom and eternal life, we must accept Jesus and the death He suffered to pay for our sins. Jesus Christ is the one and only way to the Father. He is the pearl we seek so that we may enter into the kingdom.

In the parable, when the merchant finds the pearl, he recognizes the great value it holds and sells all that he has to purchase it. Through this, we can understand the type of response that is necessary to come into the kingdom of God. For the sake of one pearl - for Jesus - everything must be sold. When we recognize the wealth that is in Jesus Christ, what are we willing to give up to be with Him?

There are certain attitudes or actions that obstruct our relationship with Christ that we must "sell" or get rid of in order to be with Him.

1. First, we must let go of our doubt about God's activity in the world. When difficult things happen in life, we want to be able to move beyond asking questions like, "How could God permit this?" and instead, trust in Him.
2. Second, we need to discard our critical thoughts towards others, as this can lead to conflict and damaged relationships. Rather, we want to focus on loving our neighbor.
3. Third, we get rid of any bitterness we have over being treated unjustly and move forward to seek reconciliation.
4. And last, we do not want to rely on material possessions to bring us joy. Looking to earthly things as the source of satisfaction and wealth in our lives causes us to lose the One who truly makes us rich. Paul beautifully expressed this sentiment in Philippians 3, verse 7 – *But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.*

The merchant knew that when he came across a pearl that was truly valuable, there was nothing else that could ever compare. We also want to realize that when Jesus is in our lives, we are rich in everything; nothing else can give us the kind of love, the kind of joy, and the kind of peace that He offers. We have an urgent need for Christ in our lives. Knowing this, we actively seek Him. And just as the merchant immediately sold his belongings to purchase the pearl he had been seeking, we are also called to respond in a decisive way. Confronted with the richness in Christ, we must decide if, from that moment on, we will invest everything we have and everything we are in Him. We choose Jesus Christ, not allowing anything to deter us from being with Him, because He is the One we have been searching for.