**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**MATTHEW-085**. **TREASURE AND PEARL by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"44.* *The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. 45. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman, seeking goodly pearls: 46. Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."*

*Matthew 13:44-46*

In this couple of parables, which are twins, and must be taken together, our Lord utilises two very familiar facts of old-world life, both of them arising from a similar cause. In the days when there were no banks and no limited liability companies, it was difficult for a man to know what to do with his little savings. In old times government meant oppression, and it was dangerous to seem to have any riches. In old days war stalked over the land, and men's property must be portable or else concealed. So, on the one hand we find the practice of hiding away little hoards in some suitable place, beneath a rock, in the cleft of a tree, or a hole dug in the ground, and then, perhaps, the man died before he came back for his wealth. Or, again, another man might prefer to carry his wealth about with him. So he went and got jewels, easily carried, not easily noticed, easily convertible into what he might require.

And, says our Lord, these two practices, with which all the people to whom He was speaking were very much more familiar than we are, teach us something about the kingdom of God. Now, I am not going to be tempted to discuss what our Lord means by that phrase, so frequent upon His lips, the kingdom of Godor of heaven. Suffice it to say that it means, in the most general terms, a state or order of things in which God is King, and His will supreme and sovereign. Christ came, as He tells us, to found and to extend that kingdom upon earth. A man can go into it, and it can come into a man, and the conditions on which he enters into it, and it into him, are laid down in this pair of parables. So I ask you to notice their similarities and their divergences. They begin alike and they run on alike for a little way, and then they diverge. There is a fork in the road, and they reunite at the end again. They agree in their representation of the treasure; they diverge in their explanation of the process of discovering it, and they unite at last in the final issue. So, then, we have to look at these three points.

**I. Let me ask you to think that the true treasure for a man lies in the kingdom of God.**

It is not exactly said that the treasure is the kingdom, but the treasure is found in the kingdom, and nowhere else. Let us put away the metaphor; it means that the only thing that will make us rich is loving submission to the supreme law of the God whom we love because we know that He loves us. You may put that thought into half a dozen different forms. You may say that the treasure is the blessing that comes from Christianity, or the inward wealth of a submissive heart, or may use various modes of expression, but below them all lies this one great thought, that it is laid on my heart, dear brethren, to try and lay on yours now, that, when all is said and done, the only possession that makes us rich is--is what? God Himself. For that is the deepest meaning of the treasure. And whatever other forms of expression we may use to designate it, they all come back at last to this, that the wealth of the human soul is to have God for its very own.

Let me run over two or three points that show us that. That treasure is the only one that meets our deepest poverty. We do not all know what that is, but whether you know it or not, dear friend, the thing that you want most is to have your sins dealt with, in the double way of having them forgiven as guilt, and in having them taken away from you as tyrants and dominators over your wills. And it is only God who can do that, God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and giving them, by a new life which He breathes into dead souls, emancipation from the tyrants that rule over them, and thus bringing them into the liberty of the glory of the sons of God. Thou sayest that Thou art rich and increased with goods ... and knowest not that thou art poor ... and naked. Brother, until you have found out that it is only God who will save you from being bankrupt, and enable you to pay your debts, which are your duties, you do not know where your true riches are. And if you have all that men can acquire of the lower things of life, whether of what is generally called wealth or of other material benefits, and have that great indebtedness standing against you, you are but an insolvent after all. Here is the treasure that will make you rich, because it will pay your debts, and endow you with capacity enough to meet all future expenditure--viz. the possession of the forgiving and cleansing grace of God which is in Jesus Christ. If you have that, you are rich; if you do not possess it, you are poor. Now you believe that, as much as I do, most of you. Well, what do you do in consequence?

Further, the possession of God, who belongs to all those that are the subjects of the kingdom of God, is our true treasure, because that wealth, and that alone, meets at once all the diverse wants of the human soul. There is nothing else of which that can be said. There are a great many other precious things in this world--human loves, earthly ambitions of noble and legitimate kinds. No one but a fool will deny the convenience and the good of having a competency of this world's possessions. But all these have this miserable defect, or rather limitation, that they each satisfy some little corner of a man's nature, and leave all the rest, if I may so say, like the beasts in a menagerie whose turn has not yet come to be fed, yelping and growling while the keeper is at the den of another one. There is only one thing that, being applied, as it were, at the very centre, will diffuse itself, like some fragrant perfume, through the whole sphere, and fill the else scentless air with its rich and refreshing fragrance. There is but one wealth which meets the whole of human nature. You, however small you are, however insignificant people may think you, however humbly you may think of yourselves, you are so great that the whole created Universe, if it were yours, would be all too little for you. You cannot fill a bottomless bog with any number of cartloads of earth. And you know as well as I can tell you that he that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase, and that none of the good things here below, rich and precious as many of them are, are large enough to fill, much less to expand, the limitless desires of one human heart. As the ancient Latin father said, Lord, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is unquiet till it attains to Thee.

Closely connected with that thought, but capable of being dealt with for a moment apart, is the other, that this is our true treasure, because we have it all in one.

You remember the beautiful emphasis of one of the parables in our text about the man that dissipated himself in seeking for many goodly pearls? He had secured a whole casket full of little ones. They were pearls, they were many; but then he saw one Orient pearl, and he said, The one is more than the many. Let me have unity, for there is rest; whereas in multiplicity there is restlessness and change. The sky to-night may be filled with galaxies of stars. Better one sun than a million twinkling tininesses that fill the heavens, and yet do not scatter the darkness. Oh, brethren, to have one aim, one love, one treasure, one Christ, one God--there is the secret of blessedness. Unite my heart to fear Thy name; and then all the miseries of multiplicity, and of drawing our supplies from a multitude of separate lakes, will be at an end, when our souls are flooded from the one fountain of life that can never fail or be turbid. Thus, the unity of the treasure is the supreme excellence of the treasure.

Nor need I remind you in more than a word of how this is our true treasure, because it is our permanent one. Nothing that can be taken from me is truly mine. Those of you who have lived in a great commercial community as long as I have done, know that it is not for nothing that sovereigns are made circular, for they roll very rapidly, and riches take to themselves wings and fly away. We can all go back to instances of men who set their hearts upon wealth, and flaunted their little hour before us as kings of the Exchange, and were objects of adoration and of envy, and at last were left stranded in poverty. Nothing that can be stripped from you by the accidents of life, or by inevitable death, is worth calling your good. You must have something that is intertwined with the very fibres of your being. And I, unworthy as I am, come to you, dear friends, now, with this proffer of the great gift of wealth from which 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. And I beseech you to ask yourselves, Is there anything worth calling wealth, except that wealth which meets my deepest need, which satisfies my whole nature, which I may have all in one, and which, if I have, I may have for ever? That wealth is the God who may be the strength of your hearts and your heritage for ever.

**II. Now notice, secondly, the concealment of the treasure.**

According to the first of our parables, the treasure was hid in a field. That is very largely local colouring, which gives veracity and vraisemblance to the fact of the story. And there has been a great deal of very unnecessary and misplaced ingenuity spent in trying to force interpretations upon every feature of the parable, which I do not intend to imitate, but I just wish to suggest one thing. Here was this man in the story, who had plodded across that field a thousand times, and knew every clod of it, and had never seen the wealth that was lying six inches below the surface. Now, that is very like some of my present hearers. God's treasure comes to the world in a form which to a great many people veils, if it does not altogether hide, its preciousness. You have heard sermons till you are sick of sermons, and I do not wonder at it, if you have heard them and never thought of acting on them. You know all that I can tell you, most of you, about Jesus Christ, and what He has done for you, and what you should do towards Him, and your familiarity with the Word has blinded you to its spirit and its power. You have gone over the field so often that you have made a path across it, and it seems incredible to you that there should be anything worth your picking up there. Ah! dear friends, Jesus Christ, when He was here, in whom were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, had to the men that looked upon Him neither form nor comeliness that they should desire Him, and He was to them a stumbling-block and foolishness. And Christ's Gospel comes among busy men, worldly men, men who are under the dominion of their passions and desires, men who are pursuing science and knowledge, and it looks to them very homely, very insignificant; they do not know what treasure is lying in it. You do not know what treasure is lying--may I venture to say it?--in these poor words of mine, in so far as they truly represent the mind and will of God. Dear brethren, the treasure is hid, but that is not because God did not wish you to see it; it is because you have made yourselves blind to its flashing brightness. If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them ... in whom the god of this world hath blinded their eyes. If your whole desires are passionately set on that which Manchester recognises as the summum bonum, or, if you are living without a thought beyond this present, how can you expect to see the treasure, though it is lying there before your eyes? You have buried it, or, rather, you have made that which is its necessary envelope to be its obscuration. I pray you, look through the forms, look beneath the words of Scripture, and try and clear your eyesight from the hallucinations of the dazzling present, and you will see the treasure that is hid in the field.

**III. Again, let me ask you to notice, further, the two ways of finding.**

The rustic in the first story, who, as I said, had plodded across the field a hundred times, was doing it for the hundred and first, or perhaps was at work there with his mattock or his homely plough. And, perchance, some stroke of the spade, or push of the coulter, went a little deeper than usual, and there flashed the gold, or some shower of rain came on, and washed away a little of the superincumbent soil, and laid bare the bag. Now, that is what often happens, for you have to remember that though you are not seeking God, God is always seeking you, and so the great saying comes to be true, I am found of them that sought Me not. There have been many cases like the one of the man who, breathing out threatenings and slaughter, with no thought in his mind except to bind the disciples and bring them captive to Jerusalem, saw suddenly a light from heaven flashing down upon him, and a Voice that pulled him up in the midst of his career. Ah! it would be an awful thing if no one found Christ except those who set out to seek for Him. Like the dew on the grass that waiteth not for men, nor tarrieth for the sons of men, He often comes to hearts that are thinking about nothing less than about Him.

There are men and women listening to me now who did not come here with any expectation of being confronted with this message to their souls; they may have been drawn by curiosity or by a hundred other motives. If there is one such, to whom I am speaking, who has had no desires after the treasure, who has never thought that God was his only Good, who has been swallowed up in worldly things and the common affairs of life, and who now feels as if a sudden flash had laid bare the hidden wealth in the familiar Gospel, I beseech such a one not to turn away from the discovered treasure, but to make it his own. Dear friend, you may not be looking for the wealth, but Christ is looking for His lost coin. And, though it has rolled away into some dusty corner, and is lying there all unaware, I venture to say that He is seeking you by my poor words to-night, and is saying to you: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire.

But then another class is described in the other parable of the merchantman who was seeking many goodly pearls. I suppose he may stand as a representative of a class of whom I have no doubt there are some other representatives hearing me now, namely, persons who, without yielding themselves to the claims of Christ, have been searching, honestly and earnestly, for whatsoever things are lovely and of good report. Dear brethren, if you have been smitten by the desire to live noble lives, if you have been roused

To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,

Beyond the furthest bounds of human thought,

or if in any way you are going through the world with your eyes looking for something else than the world's gross good, and are seeking for the many pearls, I beseech you to lay this truth to heart, that you will never find what you seek, until you understand that the many have not it to give you, and that the One has. And when Christ draws near to you and says, Whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are venerable, if thou seekest them, take Me, and thou wilt find them all, I beseech you, accept Him. There are two ways of finding the treasure. It is flashed on unexpectant eyes, and it is disclosed to seeking souls.

**III. And now, lastly, let us look at the point where the parables converge.**

There are two ways of finding; there is only one way of getting. The one man went and sold all that he had and bought the field. Never mind about the morality of the transaction: that has nothing to do with our Lord's purpose. Perhaps it was not quite honest of this man to bury the treasure again, and then to go and buy the field for less than it was worth, but the point is that, however a soul is brought to see that God in Christ is all that he needs, there is only one way of getting Him, and that is, sell all that thou hast.

Then it is barter, is it? Then it is salvation by works after all?No! To sell all that thou hastis first, to abandon all hope of acquiring the treasure by anything that thou hast. We buy it when we acknowledge that we have nothing of our own to buy it with. Buy it without money and without price; buy it by yielding your hearts; buy it by ceasing to cling to earth and creatures, as if they were your good. That trust in Jesus Christ, which is the condition of salvation is selling all that thou hast. Self is all that thou hast. Abandon self and clutch Him, and the treasure is thine. But the initial act of faith has to be carried on through a life of self-denial and self-sacrifice, and the subjection of self-will, which is the hardest of all, and the submission of one's self altogether to the kingdom of God and to its King. If we do thus we shall have the treasure, and if we do not thus we shall not.

Surely it is reasonable to fling away paste pearls for real ones. Surely it is reasonable to fling away brass counters for gold coins. Surely, in all regions of life, we willingly sacrifice the second best in order to get the very best. Surely if the wealth which is in God is more precious than all besides, you have the best of the bargain, if you part with the world and yourselves and get Him. And if, on the other hand, you stick to the second best and cleave to yourselves and to this poor diurnal sphere and what it contains, then I will tell you what your epitaph will be. It is written in one of the Psalms, He shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his latter end shall be a fool.

And there is a more foolish fool still--the man who, when he has seen the treasure, flings another shovelful of earth upon it, and goes away and does not buy it, nor think anything more about it. Dear brother, do not do that, but if, by God's help, any poor words of mine have stirred anything in your hearts of recognition of what your true wealth is, do not rest until you have done what is needful to possess it, given away yourselves, and in exchange received Christ, and in Him wealth for evermore.