

# The Treasure and the Pearl

by Charles Finney

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of finding Christ in a truly spiritual sense, beyond mere historical or theological knowledge, and the conditions under which this can be achieved, including knowing oneself, considering the Bible, prayer, and avoiding prejudice.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 13:44

**Topics:** "Spiritual Pursuit", "Value of Christ"

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## Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the immense value of finding Christ, likening Him to a hidden treasure and a precious pearl. He explains that true discovery of Christ requires a deep understanding of one's spiritual needs and a genuine desire for redemption. Finney warns against superficial knowledge of Christ, urging believers to seek a transformative relationship that leads to self-renunciation and a complete embrace of Christ's glory. He highlights the necessity of prayer, self-examination, and reliance on the Holy Spirit to truly appreciate the richness of Christ. Ultimately, he calls for a heartfelt pursuit of Christ, which will result in a life that values Him above all else.

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## Transcript

"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. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man, seeking goodly pearls; who, when he hath found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." Matthew 13:44-46

Here we have two parables to illustrate manifestly one idea. It first compares the kingdom of heaven to treasure hid in a field, which a man, having found, sells all he has and buys it. The second gives us the case of a merchant-man seeking choice pearls, who, having found one of very great value, sells all he has and buys it.

What do this treasure and this pearl represent?

Jesus Christ, beyond a doubt. The parables are intended to show how it is in the kingdom of God. When Christ is really found, he charms the soul away from every thing else.

Here we must enquire first--What is implied in finding Christ, this great treasure?

It is plain that the very idea of finding a treasure and being appropriately affected thereby, implies that the finder appreciates its value. Applying this obvious fact to the finding of Christ, it is plain that men may learn something about him in the merely speculative sense, and be none the wiser or richer, for they may, in their hearts, reject him, despite of such knowledge. To find Christ, therefore, in the true sense, cannot be a merely historical finding, or a theological, or a doctrinal finding. In fact, men have often found Christ in these speculative senses, without being led thereby to sell all to buy him. In the merely historical sense, Christ may be found without any such result, as these parables indicate.

Again, I remark--In these parables, Christ teaches not only how things ought to be, but how they are--the actual results of this finding. The repetition in a second parable, reveals his earnestness in inculcating these ideas.

It is plain that the finding of Christ in this sense is very much misunderstood. If, in fact, men who really find Christ, sell all that they have, it must be that this finding has taken strong hold of the soul.

It must imply a spiritual apprehension of Christ, reaching to his real nature. The mind must apprehend him as more than a mere man who lived, died, and went to heaven. It must require something more than these views of Christ, to produce the results given in our text. He might have lived and died as the first and greatest of martyrs, and yet, even so, none of these emphatic results would follow. But, plainly, the soul must understand Christ in a truly spiritual sense--in a sense that takes strong hold of the mind. The soul must perceive the infinite richness, fulness and glory of Christ. Else he will be only a root out of dry ground, and you will see in him no form and comeliness.

Hence, it is essential that we enquire next--What are the conditions under which Christ may be thus seen and found?

1. You must thoroughly know yourself and your spiritual wants.

Nobody is much interested in knowing a remedy for a disease which he neither feels nor fears. Suppose some great remedy were proclaimed among us, and we were all fully assured that it had performed many cures. The testimony seems fair; but, if nobody is suffering from the disease, and if none of the people fear it, there will be very little interest taken in it. Perhaps you could not sell an ounce of it, or get the attention of the people to it for five minutes. There is no sense of want, in relation to that remedy.

So, unless people come to have a deep sense of their own spiritual disease, they will not seek after Christ, and, of course, will not find him.

But, in order to understand ourselves, we must search ourselves most honestly, and be quite willing to weigh ourselves "in the balances of the sanctuary." If a man will not admit these convictions of personal guilt--will not let the light of God's word shine in upon his heart, and even shine through his heart, there is no hope for him. Self-blinded to his sin and consequent danger, he must go down to eternal darkness. For God does not deal with us as with stocks, but as with thinking minds. He gives us his law as our rule, and asks us to study it and judge ourselves by its demands. Hence, unless one has made up his mind to know himself, and is willing both to take the trouble and to admit to his heart the whole truth--there is no hope for him. It is amazing to see how much self-delusion there is, and how much lack of self-scrutiny.

Another condition of feeling one's need of Christ is that he consider deeply what the Bible teaches respecting himself. It is amazing to see how many read and hear the Bible over and over, and it never gets

hold of their attention, and, consequently, they get no just conception of its greatest and most vital truths. "Why did not you tell me of these things before?" said a young man who had heard the gospel, and who had the finest possible opportunity to know all about it, but who had ruled it out of his mind--"Why did you not tell me there was such a hell?"

I did tell you; I have often told you and urged it upon your attention.

"No; but you did not get it before my mind."

The reason was, you would not attend to it.

Sometimes one will read a book in time of sermon, as if determined not to hear. Of course, he hears nothing to any purpose. Sometimes, one will sit down to read a chapter in the Bible. A great many precious things are in it, but his eye slips over everything, for his heart is not there. He is not searching for truth and wisdom as worldly men dig for hid treasure. Is it strange that men fail to find the things of the gospel?

Again, another condition is prayer. There must be earnest, persevering prayer, and the reason why is, that you need God's light and wisdom to instruct you, and he gives only to those who humbly ask. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally; and it shall be given him. A Unitarian lady, last winter, who had been strong in her position, finally consented to ask the ladies to pray with her and for her. I said to her--You have not seen Christ. He has not revealed himself to you by his Spirit. You have been speculating on some of the theological points about Christ, and you have been trying to sustain yourself against the orthodox. She answered, Yes--just so. I then laid the truths of the gospel concerning Christ before her, and showed her what action she needed to take herself in regard to Christ. She said she would submit her will to his. I prayed with her, and, after I had closed and left, she still continued on her knees and remained there nearly all the night. The next morning, she sent word to the ladies to pray for her that she might know Christ. Ultimately, Christ came; and she exclaimed--"O what revelations did Christ make of himself to my soul!" By asking for prayer in her behalf, she had laid herself open to the truth, and to the Spirit who teaches truth.

Again, you must forbear to make your own experience a standard in such a sense that you will assume that what you have not known is not worth knowing. Beware of this! If you have not so found Christ that he is more to you than all things else, you ought to understand that you have made very little advance in piety if indeed you have made any at all. If you have not found him spiritually, and so found him that your soul is seized and held by Christ, you ought to assume that there is something more yet for you to know.

Take care, also, not to make uninspired men your standard, above the Bible. Don't get anybody's biography and read it as your standard; and especially not, the biography of one who has not known Christ. But read your Bible; and be assured there is no teaching so plain as that. If you will go right to the Bible, and get Christ to teach you, all will be well. Raise the enquiry on every passage. What does this mean? Go upon your knees and ask that divine light may shine upon your soul. I knew a young man, who, if he found any difficult passage in reading the Bible, would go at once to no other fountain of wisdom save to Christ himself. And you need not doubt that Christ will teach you if you really go to him.

Moreover, you must beware of prejudice. You may be under the influence of many of which you are not aware. Avoid the posture of committal to any opinions which you have not surely learned from God's word. Let no such committal stand in your way. I know not how many cases I found last winter of those whose

minds had been confused with conflicting speculations about Christ. I often said--You have been discussing these questions here all your life. A little practical experience of Christ as your Savior from sin, would be worth more than all the speculative wisdom you have attained. I became much interested in the case of one young man who had been abroad to complete his education, but who returned with his faith in Christ and Christianity sadly shaken. His Christian friends had been greatly distressed for him. During the winter, a friend of his wrote to him to come to Boston. When he came, this friend of his did not pretend that she could relieve him of his speculative difficulties, but she gave herself to prayer for him, and so did others. When I met him, it was easy to show him that every form of infidelity is self-annihilating. He admitted this, and finally said that the only two consistent schemes were, the common or orthodox one, and nihilism. I said to him--Can you believe the latter? He answered, Yes. Then you can believe there is neither matter nor mind? Yes. One more question--What is that which has this belief? What forms this conception? Is this done by a non-entity--a mere thing? Is your own mind a mere negation?

Then I added--Young man, I advise you to pray. You are not so great a man as you may suppose. It could not be amiss for you to humble yourself before God, beg his forgiveness, and implore his teaching. He did pray; and his friends also prayed--till he came into the light of the gospel and found Christ.

I must now pass to notice, in greater detail, the results of thus finding Christ.

The text represents self-renunciation as one of them. He who finds the goodly pearl, sells all that he has to buy it. When you thus apprehend Christ, you will say as Paul, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." It is every way natural that this should be so. It will result in fact. Those who find Christ, will forsake all in the sense of disclaiming all right to hold their property as their own. They abjure all selfish holding of property, and all careful anxiety about any thing of a worldly nature.

Those who find Christ to be really their advocate, and know him to be made of God unto them their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, will find no more need of legal efforts to work out their own salvation. When Christ does all this for the soul, it is enough, and is felt to be. The sinner needs a righteousness; in Christ he finds it. Find in Christ every thing which before he sought in selfish works, what further need has he of self-righteousness? The old robes, or rather rags, may well be laid off and cast away!

Again, finding Christ in our mental perception results in finding him in our own experience. We come to feel in our own experience that we have a living Savior. When the soul renounces every thing else and embraces Christ, then He reproduces himself in the soul.

The Bible distinctly teaches that unconverted men do not thoroughly understand the gospel, and never would have devised such a scheme. Paul in 1 Cor. 2, says, "We speak the wisdom of God--that (long) hidden wisdom, which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, (as it is written,) Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, . . . the things which God hath prepared for them that love him," (in the gospel system and to be revealed in gospel times);--"But God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit." "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, because they are foolishness to him." He does not feel his want of them; hence does not appreciate their value, nor even comprehend their nature. It is doubtful whether Judas ever well understood Christ. He doubtless heard much about him, and may have had some queries raised in his mind; but, obviously, he did not correctly understand him.

REMARKS.

The Bible is remarkably a dead letter to every man until the Spirit of God convicts him of sin. Its first power on the heart is only to condemn. The sinner's first experience of the power of the Bible is in its condemning sentence, and in its fearful revealings of his own sin. Conviction fastens on him; his soul, full of want, sallies forth after something better.

Have you ever had this experience--a deep conviction that you must have something better than your own righteousness? If so, you can appreciate the change that takes place, under this conviction, in the soul's estimate of the value of Christ. If any man can introduce an effectual remedy when a fearful disease is raging in every family, it will be of some use to cry aloud in all the streets--a remedy, a certain cure! A cure for the cholera--a cure for the plague! If the cholera were here in its fearful terrors; if, casting your eye from the window at any hour, you could see hearses moving on, slowly and solemnly with their dead; if, in every house, you would find some loved inmate dead;--in such a state of things, men would gather in troops round the placard, crying out--Will it bring salvation? Will it stay this fearful plague?

So, under conviction of sin, men cry out--Tell us that again! Even as when the apostles preached with convincing power, men begged of them to tell them more of those glad tidings, on the next Sabbath. Father Oliphant once said--"I have been reading the Bible now two hours, and have read over yet but two verses." Ah, he had been drinking in their spirit, and partaking of their power! Christ spake to his soul!--Said I not unto thee, "If thou canst believe, thou shalt see the glory of God?" And have not some of you lingered long on your knees, while Christ was saying to your inmost heart--Said I not unto thee, "All things are possible to him that believeth?" The fact is, that when the heart is laid open and prepared to have his glory revealed, a single sentence, a word, has an ocean of meaning. Now, the pearl of great price is found, and verily all else is worthless but Christ. When you speak to them of Christ, they cry--Tell us that story of the cross again! There is no end to their desire to hear of Christ.

I have had occasion many times to say to my friends--You can never settle these questions about the person of Christ, by controversy. You must go to Christ for yourselves and say to him--Reveal thyself to me; Thou art divine; let me know it in my own experience. Didst thou not say--"When he, the Spirit of truth shall come, he shall guide you into all truth; he shall reprove the world of sin because they believe not on me?" Let that Spirit guide, reprove and sanctify me.

Again, it often happens that persons are too self-righteous. You may say to them--Christ is precious--the chief among ten thousands; but they don't understand it. Ask them--have you ever found Jesus near? They don't know that they have. The truth is, they need to see him and to get such apprehensions of him that they cannot but know him.

How few seem to have found Christ and renounced all things for his sake. The Psalmist said--"Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth whom I desire besides thee;" but, alas, there are not many to sympathize in these utterances of his heart.

Let me say to every unpardoned sinner--You need to find Christ. You complain of condemnation and bondage. If you can only find that goodly treasure in the field, you will part with all things, as of little worth, that you may gain it.

If ministers do not preach the law, they cannot make men understand the gospel. So long as the spirituality of the law is not understood, people will lose the true idea of Christ.

Sometimes, after the law has deeply convicted men of sin, a single sermon on Christ will bring in hundreds to accept him as their Savior. But, if men have not this sense of lostness, preaching Christ to them does them no good. You might as well proclaim a remedy for an unknown disease.

Who of you have found Christ? Whoever has will say--The treasure is far richer than I expected. So it will always be. And with every fresh view of his glories, deeper and deeper will sink your views of self; higher and higher will rise your views of Christ.

If you have not really found Christ, so that you can truly count all things but loss for his name, then you have much more yet to do. You have by no means reached the place yet to rest. O, if theological students were to seek Christ more, and the love of book-learning less, they would surely have far more power. Let them get a rich experience of Christ in the soul, and then they will have one of the first requisites for preaching Christ out of their very souls. It is entirely essential to persuasive eloquence that men should absolutely know that of which they try to persuade others.

On the same principle, every church member needs to have the living gospel in his own heart before he can hope to commend it with any effect to the hearts of his fellow-men. You must yourself find Christ as the merchant-man found a precious pearl; then you can direct your fellows how to search and where to find.

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