



The Online Library of T. Austin-Sparks

Published as a PDF by Austin-Sparks.net
Email: info@austin-sparks.net

In keeping with T. Austin-Sparks' wishes that what was freely received should be freely given and not sold for profit, and that his messages be reproduced word for word, we ask if you choose to share these messages with others, to please respect his wishes and offer them freely - free of any changes, free of any charge (except necessary distribution costs) and with this statement included.

A Pearl of Great Price

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from a message given in November, 1958.

The gospel by Matthew, the gospel by Matthew chapter 13, verses 45 and 46: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls, and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it".

Without any time taken to establish what I feel is an accepted fact, we assume that this "pearl of great price" is the church; that the merchant man "seeking goodly pearls" is Christ and that this is His own description of His church. "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for it".

Of course, here at the time when the Lord Jesus said this, the church was not actually in existence on the earth; it was born on the day of Pentecost. So neither was it fully formed and perfected; it was not *actually* the pearl. But this is the Lord's description of what He was seeking, and of what the church is in His own heavenly mind: a pearl of great price.

If, then, this is a true interpretation, that this 'pearl' represents the church, we can pass to the next conclusion, which I think is also beyond debate, that what is true in the Lord's mind of the whole, should be true in every part. That is, what the church in general, universal, is in the mind of the Lord, should be in all its parts locally. If that again is a true interpretation, every local company or part of the Body of Christ should correspond to this description: a pearl, and a pearl of great price.

Very briefly, let us look at some of the features and characteristics of this pearl as they are included in this description.

First of all, the principle of *selectiveness* is seen at work: "seeking goodly pearls, and when He had found one... of great price, He went and sold all that He had, and bought *it*". The whole wonderful truth of Divine choice, if you like, election. For the moment *selectiveness* is here before us in His words - something that the Lord has selected, has chosen, has decided upon amongst many other things that He might have of lesser value, as *the* thing that answers to His heart. That great principle and truth of selectiveness, of course, is right at the heart of the revelation that has come to us in the New Testament, "He is a chosen vessel unto Me", said the Lord about Paul. And Paul transferred that very truth to the church: "chosen in Him before the foundation..."; "ye are an elect race"; something selected by the Lord to serve Him in the satisfaction of His own nature, His own heart, to fulfil a specific purpose in His eternal counsel. Chosen, selected, *for* something. The Lord's 'selectiveness' is not just that He prefers that, but it is related to something which *only that can serve*; it is something specific; only that can do that. He selects as He would select (changing the metaphor) a tool, by which alone He could do a certain piece of work - just that; anything else won't do, anything other won't do; it is that.

And I entreat you, dear friends, to lay hold of these things, simple as they may sound, and believe that if that is true of the church as a whole, that is to be true of any part of the church, anywhere. It is something that has not just come into being willy-nilly, or by any other way than the Lord chose to have that; the Lord selected that; the Lord picked that out for something. Oh, if that were true, what meaning it would give to everything, wouldn't it? It would place everything upon a basis of meaning and significance, and it would explain so much. That, then, as we go on.

Then, not only selectiveness, but *distinctiveness*; it's here inherent in this parable in two short verses. Distinctiveness; this is different: this is different, this is something particular, something peculiar, something in itself; it is distinguished. Amongst all the pearls that might be, this is different. It *must* be different, both to satisfy Him, and to fulfil His purpose. And you at once realise that that could be followed out along many lines, in many connections. But here again, as a part of the great revelation of the church, it is something different; fundamentally different, characteristically different; it is not all of a piece with anything and everything else; it's distinguished. His eyes, if we follow the parable, pass over many things, and He says: "This, this is different. This is different".

We do need to ask the Lord what that means; we know that the church is different, the *true* church is different. But Paul, on more than one occasion, spoke about "the things which differ", the things which differ even in the realm of Christianity - things which differ. You and I need that faculty for discernment and discrimination, insight and perception, to see the things that differ; not just the great difference between the church and the world, of course there is that, we don't have any difficulty over that, but there are differences in an inner circle between things - this, and that. And it is just that distinctiveness that the Lord really is after. This, this is something with a *distinctive* value, and a *distinctive* character and, if you like, a *distinctive* message. This is something which is distinguished as clear-cut, and clearly defined, and not mixed up in a jumble of all sorts of things; it stands out; there is no mistaking the character of this; it is different, it's just different. You may not be able to explain or define the difference, but the verdict is: it's different. That is true about the church, isn't it? We all agree as to the church according to God's mind, there's something very *distinct* in God's universe, outstanding. It's to be like that in every part of its expression locally.

The next thing, so obvious: its *preciousness* in the sight of the Lord. A pearl, here is the description: "of *great price*"; of *great price* - something very precious to the Lord. We know what it cost Him, the price that He paid for it: "Christ loved the church, and gave *Himself* up for it"; "The church of God which He purchased with His own blood"; and so on and on... very precious to the Lord.

Do we not need, dear friends, to redeem our mentality regarding the church, and that locally, from cheapness, the commonplace, regarding it too lightly? Or, to put that the other way, do we not need a very much greater conception of how tremendously valuable a true expression of the church is to the Lord? It is priceless! He puts its value like this: "sold *all* that he had". If you can measure that in the case of the Lord Jesus, you are approximating to the measure of the value of the church universal and local to the Lord, when it corresponds to His mind. A pearl of *great price*, very precious.

And when we are talking like that, of course, we are talking about one another, aren't we? It is about one another - that's all. It can be put in many, many ways. Paul put it another way: "The hand cannot say to the foot, I have no need of you - we can dispense with you". There's nothing cheap in the Body of Christ; nothing that can be discarded like that, as without value. Of *great price*.

Next, here is represented in this pearl everything: fulness and finality. For this Divine merchant man it was everything; it was not one of a number of things; it was not just a bit better than others; it was not an alternative, that He had something else, as we say, 'up his sleeve' if it failed. For Him it was everything, and, if it is everything, that is final; there is nothing beyond it.

Now, you are familiar enough with all the New Testament teaching about the church to know that it is the fulness of Him. He hasn't something extra, that, if it fails, it does not matter so much, "Well, if it has failed, I have got something else that I can draw upon and put in its place." No, nothing can take its place, He has nothing else to take its place. If we fail Him locally, He hasn't something to put in our place; He has not got a lot of things in reserve: "Very well, if that fails, I will do this." No, no, it is everything, and it is final. You see, that gives the sense both of fulness and of permanence, doesn't it, to what is according to the Lord's mind; He will look after that; that is permanent; that is final. If that were taken from Him, well everything is taken from Him, because He has put everything into it. But that means that it represents the finality of the Lord's interests there. The finality of the Lord's interests there.

When Israel of old, in the figure of Zion, Zion or Jerusalem, did fail the Lord, in the purpose of its election, the Lord had no alternative, the glory went off and was removed and went away, went right away. He had no second best, no second best - it was all or nothing. Fullness, finality, with that which has come out of His heart, His church.

And lastly, again so evident, here is, in all this, in all this in His selectiveness, in its distinctiveness, in its preciousness, in its fulness and finality, it is the embodiment of His suffering. How is that? It is the very synonym of suffering; its very being is the result of suffering, of wounding and bleeding, the alchemy of suffering, transmuting. The thing like this, an expression like this, in the church general or local, has to embody His suffering, not only His sufferings substitutionally - that is, of course, fundamental - but His sufferings constitutionally. Paul said: "I fill up that which remains of the sufferings of Christ for His Body's sake, which is the church"; the sufferings of Christ for His church. Christ loved and gave. The church is the embodiment of His suffering, but then, on that side, not substitutionally, but constitutionally and vocationally, the church's very life speaks of suffering; it is a

costly thing in that way. This is not something that just 'happens'; not just some gay life. This that is to serve the Lord in this way, in character and purpose, is something realised through its own suffering in fellowship with Him. There's the agony of the pearl in formation, nothing short of agony. And in order to have something like this, I think the Lord of necessity has, from time to time, to baptize us afresh into His sufferings, to bring back the agony. It is a good thing, a good thing, a painful thing and distressing thing, but it is a good thing if we are brought to the place where that which is of the Lord where we are concerned, is *so precious* that it causes us an agony if we see it in any way assailed, in danger of loss. It's an agony. The Lord precipitates that in order to have a pearl, you see; there is no pearl without suffering in itself. And while the sufferings of Christ are, in one sense, His peculiar and unique sufferings, in the redemptive sense there are the sufferings of Christ which are passed to us into which we are called - the agony for the church.

Have you got any agony for the church? I am sure you have. Real bleeding for the church local, as well as universal. I think perhaps it comes nearer home to us when it is local, but the Lord give us more of this anguish for His church as a whole, as well as for our part of it - suffering for His Body's sake so that everything is kept on this very *practical* basis - no theory, mere theory, and doctrine, and teaching, and truth, but an agony, a real travail. And then it will be precious to Him.

The merchant man, seeking goodly pearls. See what it says: the kingdom of heaven is like that, the kingdom of *heaven*. This is a *heavenly* quest for a *heavenly* thing and these are the characteristics of a heavenly thing in the eyes and mind of the Lord.