



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

The Parable
of the Pearl

The Parable
of the
Dragnet

The Parable
of the Fig
Tree

**MIDWEEK
SCRIPT**

2019

February

Session 1 – The Parable of the Pearl

Welcome to the first small group session for February. This month, we'll explore three parables that Jesus taught.

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 13:10-17, 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's 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 want to 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 3:7 – *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.

Session 2 – The Parable of the Dragnet

Welcome! Today we'll be diving into the parable of the dragnet – hopefully we won't get tangled!

Let's read it together. You can find it in Matthew 13:47-50. Feel free to follow along if you'd like.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

At a first glance, we see that the first two verses make up the parable itself, and the last two verses form an explanation. For this reason, we're going to focus our attention on the first half.

Chief Apostle Leber interpreted this parable as signifying the divine love of Jesus Christ, drawing mankind to Himself. How do people learn about the love of Christ? Through His church! We, as the Church, are the net. He explained that, "a net does not consist of isolated threads but of threads that are tightly interwoven! This is how we should be united with one another."

The term "dragnet," which is used in the parable, appears only once in the Bible. While nets were used often by the disciples, as many were fishermen, a dragnet is a specific type of net. It literally *drags* through the sea, **indiscriminately** picking up everything in its path. And that is what we are called to be as the Church: indiscriminate and non-judgmental in our sharing of Christ's love. The net *gathered some of every kind*; the gospel of Jesus is universal and available to all.

Let's read the next verse for another clue: [...] *when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away.*

That first phrase, *when it was full*, points us to the final judgment day. This will be when everything is sorted out. Although this *is* a parable about judgment, the judgment is not ours to make. The judgment is the Lord's, and only He knows what will be thrown away. We could liken this to someone picking beach glass out of the sand; to one it might look like garbage, but to another it's a beautiful treasure. As we are all sinners, it's impossible for us to know the condition of someone's soul from the outside.

That is why it is not our responsibility to sort or judge – rather, we are the gatherers! What a beautiful connection this makes to our Mission statement – reaching out to all people in order to teach them the gospel of Jesus Christ... Let's create this net of love in our congregations and in our communities, and excitedly share the message of Christ with everyone in our path!

Session 3 – The Parable of the Fig Tree

Welcome to our third and final session this month, where we'll explore what we can learn from the fig tree. In the Gospels, we find three parables that Jesus told about a fig tree, but we also find what scholars call an "acted parable" – where Jesus is teaching us something through His actions *and* words.

We can read of an actual encounter Jesus had with a fig tree that provides some important insight for us today.

In the 11th chapter of Mark, we can read about Jesus' journey from Bethany to Jerusalem, where Jesus stopped along the way because He was hungry, and then it states, *And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again."*

At first, this seems rather harsh. From a human point of view, why would Jesus curse this tree and cause it to die, especially since it wasn't even the season for figs? Let's explore this parable more deeply.

Jesus wanted to provide an image of the people of Israel at that time, who were known to be very religious people. For the most part, they observed the commandments and the Law of Moses, but wanted to make sure that everyone noticed it. Coming closer to them, Jesus could see that something was missing in their hearts. While they appeared to be faithful, they didn't possess a living faith and a true love for God, which caused them to reject Jesus as the Messiah.

You see, the leaves of the fig tree represent what others can see, such as our outward behavior. We might "look the part" of faithful people, going to church on Sundays and joining a small group on the midweek. Maybe we're even dressed nicely when we go to church; we smile and greet everyone, and say "Nice to see you." Maybe we sing in the choir, clean the church, and appear to be serving God in everything we do. Just like the leaves on the fig tree, it all looks nice.

But when Jesus comes closer to us, what does He see in our hearts? Is there some fruit there? Can He see the fruit of faith (Hebrews 11:6)? And not just an outward display of faith in God, or calling upon Him only in times of difficulty. No! Jesus wants to see a living faith and a true love for Him that drives our behavior. Beneath the leaves, He wants to find the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in us and transforming us to become like Him. He wants to see our faith in Jesus as the Son of the Living God, the One who laid down His life for us, the Risen One, and the One who came to bring salvation for you, and me, and all of mankind. He's looking for a faith that willingly professes that Jesus Christ is our Savior, who grants us eternal life. When we allow such a living faith to drive our behavior, then *this* is the reason we go to church, and is our purpose in being New Apostolic. We long to be with Him, for all eternity!

But faith is not the only fruit that Jesus would like to see in our hearts.

He's also looking for love (Matthew 22:37) – true love for the Lord Jesus. This too reveals itself in our desire to serve and bring our offerings. We don't serve God for our own interests, expecting lots of blessings. Rather, we serve the Lord because we love Him. We commit ourselves to His work of salvation, and bring our offerings because we rejoice in Him and want to help Him.

He's also looking for the fruit of oneness (John 17:21). This is more than simply coming to church, smiling, and greeting others. An important aspect of godly oneness reveals itself when we too suffer and ache from seeing division in the congregation. In such situations, we desperately want to contribute to the unity of God's people by examining what we can give – or give up – to promote oneness.

These are some of the fruits that Jesus would like to see in us. Of course, both leaves and fruit are necessary; the fig tree cannot have fruit without leaves. Similarly, the content of our heart needs to match our behavior, and vice versa.

So, in the case of this “acted parable” that Jesus has with the fig tree, it helps us understand what He is looking for in us, as His bride, when He comes again. You see, for Jesus, there is no such thing as a season of faith, a season of love, or a season of oneness. Jesus expects to see the fruit of faith, love, and oneness *all* the time. That’s the fruit He wants to find in our hearts every day until the day He returns (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

This now concludes this month’s midweek sessions studying the parables of the pearl, the dragnet, and the fig tree. There are many other parables that Jesus used, which we can read in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. I encourage you to explore these as well on your journey of becoming more like Jesus.