

In the beginning of September I attended my annual worship conference in Florida. If it's ok with you, I thought I might share a few of the things that I observed. Now, some of these observations can be found on the worship team's blog. If you didn't know that the worship team has a blog, now you do. The web address is - www.mpbcworship.blogspot.com. If you can't remember that, you can go to the church's webpage and there is a link in the bottom right hand corner under the link for Pastor Kevin's blog. If you can't remember that, you can also find it on the church's mobile app. I'm telling you all of this because our worship team does a great job of writing these blog posts and I look forward to reading them each week.

Now, here are some of my observations from the worship conference.

1. I've mentioned this before, but music people are still weird. They just are. And I can say that because I am one. Ex-Jared Anderson
2. While all of the worship artists at the conference used full worship bands, most worship ministries around the country are very small. I talked to a number of worship pastors and leaders from all over the US and most of their music ministries included them plus maybe one or two other people. They were amazed when I would tell them about all the people that are involved in our music ministry. Ex-networking time. Thank you for allowing us to do what we do and supporting us.
3. Worshiping at 8:30 a.m. is hard.
4. It's the year of the beard!
5. Men wearing skinny jeans is just wrong!
6. I'll finish with this one. Our TECH team is the BEST!!!

But I really enjoy going to the conference. The worship times are great and the speakers are outstanding. Some of the worship artists there were *Steven Curtis Chapman, Third Day, Josh Wilson, Vertical Church Band, Paul Baloche, Jeremy Camp, One Sonic Society, Lincoln Brewster, etc...* A couple of the speakers were *James McDonald (Harvest Bible Chapel/Walk in the Word Ministries) and Brady Boyd (New Life Church-Colorado)*. Each year I go and I listen and I make notes of songs I like, or technology that I think we could use, or blog ideas, or even songwriting ideas. Well, the first night of the conference, the very first worship artist was a group call Zealand Worship.



They are a new band that I had never heard of. The lead singer (the guy in the middle) used to be a part of Newsboys (he was the bass player), but now he's the lead singer of this group. His name is *Phil Joel*. Well, they were leading in worship (I liked them by the way), and as he was introducing a song, he said something that I really liked. He said that "**We worship to remember.**" We worship to remember. I like that. Because when we worship, we are reminding ourselves of who God is and all that He has done for us. Think about it. Let's say Tuesday morning (because school is out tomorrow) when you wake up, most likely the first thing that you'll think about is all of the stuff you have to do. You'll think about work or school or your problems. And so it's easy for us to get overwhelmed and bogged down by all of our problems and issues.

So, when we gather for worship on Sundays and Wednesdays we get reminded of how great God is. We get reminded that we serve a "**Strong God**", and "**In Jesus' Name**" all things are possible. We are reminded that there is no mountain in our lives that is too tall for Jesus to overcome. We cry out that Jesus wears the "**Victor's Crown**" because He defeated death, hell, and the grave. We declare that He reigns "**Forever**".

But as I thought about what Phil Joel said, I realized that not only do we worship to remember who God is and all that He has done for us. **We also worship to remember who we are to God.** We are His children. He loves us. And when we come into His presence we get to rest in His mercy, grace, and love.

So, this morning I would like for us to look at a parable Jesus told that I hope will remind us of who God is and also who we are to God. So, if you would go ahead and turn in your Bibles, tablets, or phones to **Matthew 13:45-46**. The verses will also be on the screen.

Now before I read them, I want you to notice what book of the Bible I'll be sharing from this morning. That's right, the book of Matthew. What book is Pastor Kevin currently preaching from? That's right, the book of Matthew. He is currently preaching through the Beatitudes found in chapter 5. It will probably be a while before he gets to chapter 13. Along with that, I don't want anyone to think that just because I am teaching from this passage that you don't have to be here when Pastor Kevin preaches it. I'm sure he will pull out things that I don't talk about. Plus, let's be honest, most of you won't even remember that I spoke on this passage by the time Pastor Kevin gets to it. So no excuses. Be here!

Matthew 13:45-46 (NLT).

⁴⁵ “Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. ⁴⁶ When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!

This is a parable that is very familiar to most of us. It is considered one of the hidden parables because Jesus only shares it with His disciples. He doesn't share it with the massive crowds that showed up to hear him speak. Just the disciples.

So, there is a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. Jesus and His disciples would have been very knowledgeable of merchants. Jesus spent a great deal of time around the Sea of Galilee which was home to many trade routes in that region. Many of his disciples were fisherman. Fishermen are always dealing with merchants. They were familiar with fisherman.

So, the merchant is looking for pearls. But not just pearls, choice pearls. The best pearls. And as he searched, what did he find? An extremely valuable pearl. **He found THE pearl.** In fact, it was so valuable and costly that he didn't even have enough money to buy it when he found it. He was out searching for pearls, in the plural. That means that he probably had enough money on him to buy multiple pearls. But this pearl was so expensive that he didn't have enough money. First he had to go sell everything he had to come up with the money to buy. As so that's what he did. He sold everything and bought the pearl.

Ok, this is a short little parable. So what does it mean? **In this story, we are the merchant and Jesus or God or salvation is the pearl.** To make it easier to explain, I'm just going to focus on Jesus being the pearl. And once we find the pearl (Jesus), we need to be willing to give up everything for Him. Why? Because He is worth everything.

- Because of Jesus we are made right with God. **Romans 3:22 (NLT)** says “**We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.**”
- Because of Jesus we can have eternal life. Our salvation is secure. **Romans 8:38** says that “**nothing can ever separate us from God’s love.**”
- Because of Jesus we can know peace. **Philippians 4:7 (ESV)** says “**And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**”
- Jesus gives us His peace and it calms our hearts and our fears. On a side note- my entire life whenever I’ve encountered someone who suffers from anxiety and fear, I’ve always thought “that person just needs more faith”. Because if they had more faith, they wouldn’t fear. But you know what? That’s not right. In **1 John 4:18** says that “**perfect love casts out fear**”. It’s not more faith you need. What you truly need is to know that Jesus loves you and that His perfect love can drive away your fear. Just something to think about.
- Because of Jesus, we are conquerors. The Bible says in **Romans 8:37** that “**We are more than conquerors through Christ.**” That’s right, we aren’t just conquerors. We are more than conquerors.

What do we need to remember about Jesus from this parable? Jesus should be worth everything to us. We should be willing to give up everything for Him just like the merchant was willing to sell everything so he could buy the choice pearl. Not only that, we should be willing to endure anything for Him. After all, He endured the cross for us. And through His sacrifice we are saved.

Now, that is the way that I have been taught that parable my entire life. We are the merchant and Jesus or God or salvation is the pearl. And we should be willing to give up everything for Jesus. That is a very sound and valid way of looking at this parable. And when Pastor Kevin teaches it, he very well might teach it from that exact point of view. It’s a very traditional interpretation. But, I don’t believe it’s the best interpretation of that parable.

I believe the more accurate interpretation is that instead of us being the merchant and Jesus being the pearl, Jesus is the merchant and we are the pearl. Here’s why:

1. The merchant is searching for the pearl. In the traditional interpretation (where we are the merchant) that would mean that we are searching for Jesus. The problem with that is that the sinner doesn't seek out the Savior. **Romans 3:10-11 (NLT)** says "**No one is righteous-not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God.**" No one is seeking God. Jesus is the one who does the seeking. In **Luke 19:10 (NLT)** Jesus said "**For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost**". Jesus came to seek. The sinner doesn't do the seeking. The Shepherd looks for the sheep, not the other way around. So, I believe that Jesus is the merchant.
2. The merchant bought the pearl. In the traditional interpretation (where we are the merchant and Jesus is the pearl) it would mean that somehow we buy Jesus or God or salvation. That's not the way that works. You can't buy or earn or manipulate your way to Jesus or God or salvation. **Romans 5** tells us that salvation and righteousness are a free gift from God. FREE. So, it would be impossible for us to buy Jesus or God or salvation. But you and me on the other hand; we were purchased for a price. And that price was Jesus. He sacrificed His life for us on the cross at Calvary. And just like the merchant who gave up everything he owned to purchase the choice pearl, Jesus gave up everything to purchase you and me. **Philippians 2:7** says that He "**emptied Himself**" for us. **Isaiah 53:12** says that He "**poured out His soul to the point of death**" for us. Jesus gave up everything for us so that we might be made whole and complete and righteous and holy.
3. The pearl represents us (you and me). What's interesting is that in the Old Testament, we don't see a lot about pearls. And the reason for that is that they were considered unclean to the Hebrew people. In **Leviticus 11:12 (NLT)** it says "**Any marine animal that does not have both fins and scales is detestable to you.**" A pearl comes from an oyster and an oyster doesn't have fins or scales. In fact, the Old Testament mentions a number of different gems and valuable stones, but not pearls. It's not until the New Testament that they are truly seen as valuable. I believe it's because out of all the gemstones mentioned (like diamonds, sapphires, or rubies); pearls are the only ones that are organic. And by that I mean that they come out of something that is alive, an oyster.



If you don't know how a pearl is formed, it occurs like this. Something small gets inside of an oyster shell (most likely a grain of sand). Now, this grain of sand irritates the oyster, but the oyster doesn't expel it from its shell. Instead, the oyster covers it with layer upon layer of something called nacre. And eventually, this grain of sand is turned into a pearl.



So, how are we like a pearl? The pearl starts out as something that irritates the oyster. In the same way, our sinful nature is an irritant to God and His holiness. The oyster covers its irritant with layer upon layer of nacre. In the same way, Jesus has covered us with His blood. And just like the grain of sand eventually becomes a beautiful pearl, we too become a thing of beauty after being covered by the blood of Jesus. His righteousness and holiness become ours.

Here's another way that we are like the pearl. The pearl, in and of itself, has no real value. It's just a pearl. What gives it value is the price that someone is willing to pay for it. In and of ourselves, we have no real value. We are flawed, sinful people. What gives us value is the price that Jesus was willing to pay for us. And that makes our value immeasurable.

So, let's read the parable again. This time though, think about Jesus being the merchant and you being the pearl.

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Jesus found us and bought us with His life.

So, I named this message “**We Remember**” because I wanted us to be reminded of who God is and who we are to God. When we look at the parable in the traditional way, (where we are the merchant and Jesus is the pearl) we see that Jesus is someone that we should be willing to do anything and give up anything for. He is our God, our King, our Redeemer, the one who brings true peace, love, mercy, and grace to our lives.

And when we look at the parable in this new way (where Jesus is the merchant and we are pearl), we see who we are to God. He was willing to give up everything for us. And in doing so, He has made us His children, his heirs.

To help us remember this I want to teach you the chorus of a song. This will be our kind of “invitation” time. No joining the church this morning. Pastor Kevin will be more than happy to welcome you into our church family next Sunday. Here are the words to this new song:

“We Remember”

We remember who You are

Our conquering King

The Risen One

We remember who we are

We are children of God

And we are loved

We remember