

**“Pearls of Wisdom”**

Romans 8:28-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-46

Chan Willis – F.P.C.-L.C./Welsh

July 26, 2020

Jesus’ parables in today’s passage from Matthew, at least in my view, sure seem to relate to FPC of LC: ‘smallest of all seeds’ that are sown in a ‘field’ (like a ‘MorganField’). A place, no matter how small, where God’s creatures might come to make their home. And in so doing, that ‘small seed’ might come to realize God’s promise of **growth**. That field on Corbina is believed to contain a ‘treasure’ so valuable... like a ‘pearl of great value’... that **all** of one’s possessions are **sold** in order to buy it. There is so much of these ancient parables that rings true for the congregation currently in a ‘grain silo’ (here) on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue in Lake Chuck.

So how does anyone who is NOT connected to that/this particular body of believers relate? Well, what is the common denominator in all of these parables of Jesus? A congregation? A church building? A housing development? NO. **“The Kingdom of heaven.”** And ALL of us, not matter what church we attend... IF we attend one at all... should be mindful of what we are building for the FUTURE. Not so much earthly... but heavenly. Not a human kingdom. But GOD’S kingdom. The kingdom of heaven, to which Jesus likens a man who sells all that he has for just one ‘pearl of great value.’ As in, perhaps, a **pearl of ‘wisdom’**? Perhaps like the ‘pearls of wisdom’ that are found in today’s passage from Romans 8?

As you and I seek to grow in our FAITH... which can sometimes seem even smaller than a tiny mustard seed... we must seek WISDOM greater than our own. If we are to grow strong enough to overcome the world’s constant attack on us, we must partake of the ‘Bread of Life,’ Jesus Christ; who takes the ingredients of our lives... the ‘flour,’ if you will... and mixes in the ‘yeast’ of the Holy Spirit so that those lives might ‘rise.’ By the power of that holy ‘yeast’ let us search for the

treasures found in the 'field' of God's Word... particularly in Paul's words to the church in Rome... and in Welsh/Lake Charles (& beyond). Indeed, words that serve as encouragement to ALL people who are in search of **"Pearls of Wisdom."**

When we consider all of the letters that Paul wrote, there are certainly many 'pearls' to be found. As I've said before, *Philippians* is probably my overall favorite; from **"He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it"** (1:6) to **"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"** (4:13), 'pound-for-pound' I find the 4 chapters of *Philippians* hard to beat. That being said, these 12 verses of *Romans* Ch. 8 could be considered the cornerstone of the book that New Testament scholar N.T. Wright calls Paul's '*masterpiece.*' Wright describes this letter to the Romans as the Apostle's eloquent effort to *"explain what God's been up to and where they might belong on the map of these purposes."* And so, as the saying goes, 'when in Rome, do as the Romans do,' let us too consider just what God's 'been up to,' and just how we fit into the 'map' of God's 'landscape.' And what 'pearls' we might pick up on that 'journey'...

We will start with verse 29: **"Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family."** (*Romans 8:29*) Now, just so you who saw that term 'predestined' and thought we're going to get in a long consideration of just what that problematical 'essential tenet' of our Presbyterian belief system, sorry to 'disappoint.' MUCH more important than 'Predestination' is the PERSON of Jesus Christ. Suffice it to say that this verse says that God KNEW you before you were born... and let it happen *anyway* 😊... and that God has a PLAN for your life and mine. Just don't ask me WHAT it is! Except for the fact that God wants our lives to be '**conformed**,' 'shaped' by God's loving hand to resemble the 'image' of His

only begotten Son. The **'firstborn within a LARGE family'** that includes US, Jesus' brothers and sisters. And as I look around, I can see the 'family resemblance'...

IF we can trust and believe that God KNOWS us and has a PLAN for our lives to look like Jesus, our brother, then by virtue of that **membership** 'within the large family' of God, there are certain things we should know about our 'family history.' Some assurances that God wants us to have that His love for us will never fail... even in spite of the times when we don't demonstrate OUR love for Him very well... or love of His OTHER 'children'...

To make these 'assurances' of God's 'unfailing love' for us a bit more real, and personal, I want you to repeat a few of them with me. But we will be making a grammatical change. We will make those plural personal pronouns singular. We will start with verse 28, using 'I' instead of 'we': ***"I know that all things work together for good for ME, who loves God and is called according to his purpose."*** (Rom. 8:28)

In light of all that is going on in our nation, our state, our towns, our LIVES, This may be a hard one to swallow. How in the world can God turn some of the tremendous trials and tragedies, the financial hardship and physical suffering, the division and despair, and 'work it together' for GOOD?!

As difficult as it might be, I think that we must not so much focus on our **'circum-stance'** as we should on being **'circum-spect.'** Rather than 'standing around' lamenting all that is wrong with our world... and that is a LOT... instead of dwelling on our **'circumstance'**... we should be 'looking around' at how we can show our love for God; 'circumspect' by looking within to consider how we are being 'called according to his purpose.' We must always strive to NOT be part of the *problem,*' but rather, part of the solution.

Can YOU stop this nationwide pandemic? Maybe not, but you can do your part to stop its spread. Can you solve our state and national economic crises? No, but you can patronize a local business. Can you help all those millions who are suffering emotionally and financially? No, but you can pick up the phone to call a friend, or support a local compassion ministry/agency. Whether its your own struggles or of others, you and I must KNOW that our awesome God can indeed work ALL things together for the good of US who love him and are called to his purposes.

You can say this because... now, repeat after me... ***“If God is for me, who is against me?”*** (Romans 8:31) GOD HAS YOUR BACK! If the Father would allow his Son to ‘turn his back’ to receive the pain and torture of death for US, then He is sure not going to ‘turn his back’ on you and me. With God in our corner, we need not fear anyone or anything. And How do we know that ‘God is with us?’ How about by the Hebrew translation of this statement: Emmanuel. Another title for God’s Son. ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son...”***

In spite of that overwhelming evidence of God’s love for us, we can yet feel so **unworthy**. We can think of any number of reasons why God should NOT love us. When we hear that question ***“Who (or what) will separate ME from the love of Christ?”*** we might come up with any number of things. Including many of those listed: ***“hardship... distress... persecution.”*** Or fear... anger... loss... temptation... doubt. I would say that most all of us have, at times in our lives, felt separated from God...

But in truth, we are *never* truly ‘separated’ from Christ’s love. We may turn our back on God, but God never turns His back on us. It is like I’ve said about prayer... God’s hand is always there reaching down for us, no matter how we may

think God has turned away. It is US who fail to lift up our hand to take ahold of His. God is NOT like that human friend who doesn't call when you most need them... God is NOT like that family member who is so insensitive to your pain.

Though you may not always think so, God's presence is as real as the wind blowing through the trees, or the sun rising and falling, or the tides that roll up and down on the beach.. or yes, even the rains that fall from the skies. 😊 That same ever-present God in whom Paul trusted, and indeed sang of his praises, even while locked in a prison cell. The same faithful Father whom the Son cried out from the cross, **"Into your hands I commend my spirit."** The same loving God of whom Paul promises, later in this book, **"Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord SHALL be saved."** (Rom. 10:13) Ultimately saved from whatever earthly plagues, persecution or poverty may befall us.

Confident of the final victory claimed by our Lord, Savior, and brother Jesus, we can proclaim with certainty those closing words of this passage in v. 37-39... which I offer to you in a condensed version to say with me:

***"In all these things... I AM more than a conqueror through him who loved... ME. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life... (to v. 39) nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate ... ME... from the love of God in Christ Jesus MY Lord."*** (Romans 8:37-39)

You want to talk about 'GOOD NEWS?!' I don't know about you, but when I consider all of the 'stuff' of this world that would seek to overwhelm me, make me feel small, and defeated, and helpless, it brings me great HOPE and JOY that through the Christ that loved me enough to die for me, I AM A CONQUEROR. That NOTHING in ALL of creation can SEPARATE ME from God's love. Through

Christ my Lord, I have the VICTORY. And so do YOU. Amidst all of the ‘pearls of wisdom’ we considered today, that just might be the ‘pearl of *greatest* value.’

Now, with that last statement, you might well be thinking, ‘Now wait a minute pastor! You’re going to single out this ONE passage as being above the rest? What about... (fill-in-the-blank with your favorite verse)?! How can you in good conscious rank one Scripture above so many others? As Paul himself said to his friend Timothy, isn’t ‘ALL of Scripture useful...?’

And indeed it is. The ‘rankings’ of Scripture is not really important. But rather, how they can help us to live out our sometimes ‘rank’ lives in accordance with God’s will. How God’s Word helps to prepare us for the Kingdom of Heaven... preparation that is lived out right here on earth. Let us be mindful of how we are building that **future** kingdom in the **present**... one soul at a time. As the ‘yeast’ of God’s Spirit rises in us, let us continue to seek out those ‘treasures’ hidden in the ‘harvest fields.’ As we strive to plant some tiny ‘mustard seeds’ of faith in others (while nurturing our own), let us never forget the great value to them... and to ourselves... of ‘**pearls of wisdom**’...

**CHARGE:**

**GO—as seed and yeast, willing to lose your life in the larger purposes of God.**

**GO—as fisher-men & women and treasure seekers,  
pouring out your days in search of hidden grace.**

**GO—as servants of the King of heaven, who works all things together  
for the good of those who love Him, and are called to His purposes.**

**As you go forth to proclaim to the hurting that NOTHING can separate them  
from the love of God in Christ Jesus, KNOW that you DO NOT GO ALONE...**