

## THE ORGANIC CHURCH #9: WHERE IT FITS II

### INTRODUCTION

I want to ask you a question; but first let me set it up.

#### **Matt 13**

45. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls,

46. "who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

In the time of Jesus, pearls were popular in a way they are not today. It went beyond the monetary value. Often people simply wanted to handle them and enjoy their unique luster in the light. They just wanted to connect with that kind of beauty.

Jesus used a very potent picture to present the preciousness of God's Kingdom. Here's my question, from the context, this is a Biblical parable: **Now that the seeker has the pearl, what is he supposed to do with it?**

#### **Let me share a couple of clues:**

When Jesus finished a list of analogies on ***what the kingdom of heaven was like***; He asked if they understood. When they responded yes, He said something that is pretty hard to understand. He said:

#### **Matt 13**

52. "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old."

What He is saying is; ***when you come to know God, you don't dump all the knowledge and experience you had before you knew Him.*** –And sometimes we tend to do that. We abandon our talents and skills for more "*spiritual things.*" That is not what God wants. Jesus says to keep the honorable things of our lives but invest them into God. So we are not diminished, but enriched. ***The world is richer for what we've become.***

So in effect, when this seeker found THE most precious pearl, ***he was now called to share it.*** He had become an opportunity for anyone else who was hungry for that kind of beauty.

#### ***Well, that's the parable, but how does the concept play out in 21<sup>st</sup> century America?***

*Our pearl is our relationship with Jesus Christ.* The luster of our pearl is all the *enrichment, direction, and empowerment that goes along with that relationship.*

#### ***As a church, even as a community of churches; what are we doing with our pearl?***

For literally decades, we ***hung a church-shaped board*** on the wall for everyone to see. And posted on that board was the number in attendance the previous week and how much they gave. When you entered the church that would be the first thing you'd see.

Now, don't get me wrong, those things are practical indicators of a church's health. If nobody is coming, that church isn't healthy! And if God's people sense no need to give back to God, then that church has more than financial trouble.

But if our primary focus is:

**How many? How much? How happy?**

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- That is, our measure of success is **how many people we get in the door for an hour** or so, but what they do with the rest of the week is secondary.
- **How much did they give in the collection plate** that hour is the indicator but how they invested themselves for the rest of the week is of little concern...
- As long as the **complaints are minimal, people are satisfied** with the programs and themselves...
- **Then we must be doing it right.**

Once again, those are things we want to see, but **if they are the first measure of spiritual success, even if it's unintentional**; something **deadly begins to happen**. By default, we become an **inward-looking, self-centered group**. As long as things are moving smoothly within our walls, the rest of the world can fend for itself.

Well, isn't the church supposed be a place of refuge? What's wrong with that?

Basically, this; **that is not God's plan for His church, so with that situation, God fades:**

- We **lose the power of God living within us**; that is to say, *the fruits of the Spirit*.
- We **forget how to listen to the Holy Spirit**; *no connection, no direction*.
- We even **lose the desire to stay in step** with God.
- And when that stuff happens, we begin to judge more than and help less. We may be busy, but to little effect. There are no lives changed; not even our own. –No kingdom work is done.

The Apostle Paul would describe us like this:

### **2Tim 3**

- 5. having a form of godliness but denying its power.**

Then he goes on to say that people like this are **so repulsive to God**, that Christ's people shouldn't even associate with them.

**How's our church doing? How are we doing with our "pearl of great price?"**

**What do you think?**

THE PEARL IS DESCRIBED AS THE KINGDOM OF GOD, WHAT EXACTLY IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY THE CHURCH HAS TRADITIONALLY DONE WITH THE PEARL?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY TO DO WITH THE PEARL?

THE SERMON MENTIONS THE CONSEQUENCES OF MISUSE (3 PARAGRAPHS ABOVE); WOULD YOU SAY THAT HAS HAPPENED IN CHURCHES?

## CHURCH COMMUNITIES

In his research, Dwight Smith finds churches fall into **one of two communities**. The first is what the western church has traditionally been; it is the **COLLECTING CHURCH**. The other is the **REACHING CHURCH**.

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Here are a few features of both. ***Your job is to make your own honest appraisal on which type we fit.***

### **THE COLLECTING CHURCH COMMUNITY HAS THESE FEATURES:**

- **It tends to protect its assets.**

There are only so many good church people to go around, so we're holding on to ours. We barely have enough resources to maintain our own little church. In fact we need more; so it's foolish to divert our people and money to some other place or cause. What's the benefit for us? *We need to collect in here.*

- **It concentrates on gathering priorities.**

Success is monitored, first and foremost by ***one hour on Sunday morning***. And then that is followed by whatever secondary meetings we have. How many came? Were they happy with it? Is the gathering place nice enough? Are the programs entertaining, inspiring, and polished enough to keep them coming?

Once again, this ***isn't a license for second-rate efforts***. But if the determining concern is us and not God's concerns; things can only move in one direction: towards a self-centered mentality and away from a God-centered mentality.

To frame it in a practical question: ***Is God more concerned*** that we had a "bang up" service or that hundreds of families will break up, thousands of lives will end without Him, and millions of people will continue stepping in the wrong direction because they do not know Him. -And many in our own community.

Even this week; as I was getting in the elevator after seeing Bonnie and Shane: A young lady got in, tears falling even as she entered. She told me her father was in bad shape with pneumonia, she was afraid he wouldn't make it. I asked if anyone had prayed with them. *The look on her face told me, she had never even considered the idea. **What is more important to God, the quality of our singing, or that young woman? ...What's more important to us?***

When a church's main measure of success is what happens in here, they reward themselves in here; a bigger building, nicer equipment, or better paid staff for better results, for us. That is how the average church works in our culture. *But, is that really God's intention?*

- **It releases only excess resources.**

Statistics show that a number of churches have actually spent quite a bit on missions and outreach. But compared to what they spend on themselves, it is relatively small.

The main expenditure goes to keeping people happy so they can collect more people and more money. And since the founding principle that attracted them is a type of "*spiritual consumerism*"; it would be very hard to change it now.

There is no real mentality of sacrificial giving; especially to anything outside the church's direct cause and benefit. So if there is an economic crunch, the first things to go are the "extra's", the missions and outreach.

**What do you think?**

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LOOK AT THE FEATURES IN THE COLLECTING CHURCH COMMUNITY, CAN YOU NAME SOME PRACTICAL WAYS YOU'VE SEEN THESE FEATURES PLAY OUT?

WOULD YOU SAY THESE FEATURES ARE BIBLICAL? IF NOT, WHY DO THEY HAPPEN?

### ***THEN THERE ARE THE FEATURES OF A REACHING CHURCH COMMUNITY***

- **Releasing assets is a first priority**

God's design is to empower all His people with capacities and open opportunities for them to use them; *in the world*. That is church. That means releasing *our assets* into the world. The next feature naturally follows.

- **Success is measured by what people do with their faith *outside* the church walls.**

A transformed life shows; not in a worship hour, but what is lived in the hours *between the hours* of worship.

**James 1**

**27.** Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

The orphans and widows of that day were the unprotected of that society. ***Who are the powerless in our time and culture?*** What are we doing for them?

- **The reaching church community is firmly aware of a circle of accountability.**

That is to say, God has put *this church* with *these people* here for a reason. The *time is specific*, the *church family is specific*, and the *people placed within our sphere* of influence are specific. That leads to only one conclusion: ***We are meant to reach those people in this place at this time. There is a circle of humanity for which we are specifically accountable.***

***Christ's command to the Apostles gives us a model for this circle of accountability.***

**Acts 1**

**8.** "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

***It isn't simply one circle but concentric circles.*** We are accountable for the ***community*** around us. That alone, is a mammoth task. We had prayer teams go out every Saturday for a month, and we still didn't come close to praying for every home.  
(-Perhaps if we had every member praying.)

There is the ***circle of our state and nation***. At this point something becomes very obvious, we are ***not going to get that done by ourselves***. We must team up with others God has called, regardless of denomination; if they are alive in Christ, we need partners in God's mission.

Then ***there is the world***. I love the way Jesus spoke specifically until He goes "global." He starts by mandating specific steps, but in mentioning the ends of the earth, He's speaking of the ***completion of our task***. That is left open. Why? Because as time goes on, the world changes. We don't need to worry about the final situation; we need to focus on the specifics right now. And we know enough to get started!

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Just the same; we do have a global responsibility.

I wonder as I read through the global page of our weekly prayer team: ***What encouragement we might be to a church in India surrounded by hostile Muslims or Hindus in China or East Africa, or the Middle East where persecution is the way of life?***

***What if they knew that we knew?*** What if they knew a whole “nation of priests” as 1 Peter 2:8 calls us, were lifting them up in prayer? What if they knew ***they were not alone.***

**What do you think?**

LOOK AT THE FEATURES OF A REACHING CHURCH; CAN YOU DESCRIBE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS THESE ARE PLAYED OUT?

HOW CAN A CHURCH DEVELOP THIS TYPE OF MINDSET?

### CONCLUSION

***Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like the one pearl, precious beyond price.*** He has given it to all and any of us who are willing to accept His gift. ***What an unbelievably great fortune!***

But we need to ask ourselves, ***what are we doing with that pearl?*** Is it our mindset to ***collect it to ourselves***, or to ***reach the world with it?***

We can do as we wish, but we must realize something: ***Even as it is our great fortune, it is also our responsibility.***

–The pearl; our personal relationship with God Himself; ***what are we really doing with it?***