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A sermon preached by the late Mr. J.E. Hazelton on October 6th, 1910, from the text "Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." Acts 20. 28.

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

This chapter narrates one of the most moving and tender episodes in the recorded history of the Apostle Paul, and there are few things more exquisitely touching than the interview of the Apostle Paul with these true elders who had travelled from Ephesus. We have in these words a part of Paul's farewell to them, a farewell which he spoke as he was hurrying on, bound by the Spirit, on the Lord's own errand to Jerusalem. Those Ephesian elders thought very little of the journey of between thirty and forty miles which they had to undertake in travelling from Ephesus to Miletus, the seaport of that great and flourishing city. There is but little doubt that in common with all the primitive churches, the members of this church were for the most part poor, and the elders had probably tramped the whole way from Ephesus to Miletus; but they did not mind that for it was to see and to hear him who was knit to them by the tenderest of all ties, to look again on the face of that man who had been made so great a blessing to their souls "sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake that they should see his face no more."

We behold in this interview the tender familiarity of affection, and the sadness of human sorrow in hearts moved and knit together by the love of Christ, for the love and grace of the Lord abounded. That scene on the seashore must have conveyed to the hearts of those who took part in it something of what dear Jacob felt when he awoke from his night's slumber and said "Surely this is the House of God and this the gate of heaven." We do not want only our places of worship, which are made of bricks and mortar, to constitute the House of God, but, when we are in the midst of the busy scenes of life, if the Lord is pleased to visit our souls, the place we are in becomes the House of God and the very gate of Heaven. Here was a little company, who had left the hubbub of Ephesus, and whose hearts in this place by the seashore were filled with a "peace that passeth all understanding", for they knew the constraining power of the love of God. When the Apostle spoke to them, what a sermon it was, so full of tenderness, and so manifestly under the power of the Spirit! It was the last farewell of the Apostle to the Gentiles to those dear men, and were the representatives of a deeply taught Church, for it was to this Church that the Apostle subsequently sent the Epistle to the Ephesians, setting forth the great and wonderful things of God.

The theme of the Apostle's discourse to these dear men was the Gospel of the grace of God, and his farewell to them was to commit them to God, and to the Word of His grace, which was able to build them up and give them an inheritance among them that

are sanctified. The Apostle's hopes were all directed to that world where bonds and afflictions would no longer await him, but where he would enjoy the inheritance reserved for him among them that are sanctified. This was the inheritance to which the Apostle commended these elders, and to which he bade them look by the power of the Spirit attending the word of God and His grace.

Our text sets forth first, God's treasure - the Church, and secondly, the measure of its value - purchased by His own blood, and thirdly, the solemn charge to "Take heed unto yourselves", which charge is addressed to all who profess godliness.

The Church is GOD'S TREASURE, and as the words fell from the lips of the Apostle they must have been attended with power, grace and unction to his hearers, who were something like the young men from the school of the prophets when Elijah was about to be taken away. They were to go back to a little company in the midst of a densely populated, luxurious and idolatrous city, but the Apostle reminded them that the Lord Himself would look after them, that though they should see his face no more, they were a part of the flock which God hath purchased with His own blood! The Church of God is so valuable in God's eyes that only the Holy Ghost can make men overseers of it. We have it here - "Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers." Oh! to be a member of that Church, the one Church!

One Church there is which hath no name,  
Whatever warring sects proclaim.

Astronomers tell us that our earth is one of the very tiniest specks in the great ocean of space where millions and millions of worlds are rolling around their appointed orbits; it is a tiny place compared with the worlds which come within even our ken, but it is GOD'S FIELD. A man may have vast estates, and yet there may be one particular field, associated with his dear ones, which is more precious than all else, and this tiny speck of matter which we call Earth, is God's field for it contains His people. That truth is taught in the parables of the treasure hid in a field, and the pearl of great price. There are those who turn these parables round, and make the treasure and the pearl of great price to be typical of our dear Lord, but the treasure hid in the field is a people given to the Lord from the very beginning, and that treasure is hid in the field of the world. Thus the man in the parable buys the field, having sold all that he had. In the one parable, the purchase of the field was for the sake of the treasure therein, and in the other the purchase of the goodly pearl, the pearl of great price, both of which represent the one Church. Christ purchased the world for the sake of the Church.

The Church then is the treasure - that treasure which moved the Heavenly Merchantman to come, that treasure concerning which

it is written, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." 2 Cor. 8. 9. He is the Man, the Merchant Man selling all that He had, making Himself of no reputation and coming down to this little spot that men call Earth, because His treasure was hidden there, and because there was the pearl of great price which He was to redeem with His own most precious blood. As we realise this, can we not sing -

"Saviour, if of Zion's city,  
I through grace a member am,  
Let the world deride or pity,  
I will glory in Thy Name."

Oh! to be part of the treasure hid in the field of the world!  
Oh! to be a member of that Church which is the Pearl of great price, and which the heavenly Merchantman hath redeemed by the shedding of His most precious blood!

It is good to go back, so far as enabled by the Holy Spirit, to the very beginning of things in relation to the Gospel of God. In science men desire to get to the root of things, to the beginnings, and much more important is it that we be led in thought to the beginnings of those things which pertain to our eternal salvation, that great salvation which shall bring infinite and eternal glory to the God of all grace. The purchase of this pearl, and our title, as members of the "treasure", to an inheritance among the sanctified, does not rest upon the will of any creature, but all is according to the ordered plan of our God, and in looking back, as we may in the 1st chapter, verse 4, of the Epistle to the Ephesians, to the beginning, we see the treasure "chosen in Christ Jesus" from before the foundation of the world, and we see the treasure, and the goodly pearl given by the Father to the Son before the worlds were made or an angel created. The Apostle says in the 2nd Epistle to the Thessalonians, "We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through (or "in") sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the Truth."

Now speaking of the treasure, and of the pearl of great price as representing the entire Church of God, it must be remembered that each member though now buffeted by the world and feeling almost ready to give up, yet having been brought to trust in Jesus, and to know the power of His precious blood, is a unit in that heavenly treasure for the sake of which Christ Jesus the Lord, the Son of God, came down from heaven to earth. He sought and He found us, and in what holes and corners He sought! but like the woman who sought diligently and swept her house until she had found her piece of silver (Luke XV), so the seeking and wondrous grace of our God seeks until He finds. Every sinner

who says "God be merciful to me a sinner," everyone who is made to hunger and to thirst after divine things, is an item of the treasure hid in the world and a member of that Body which is designated the "goodly pearl". When our Lord says "Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered", is it surprising that you are a part of that "treasure" which He came down from heaven to earth to seek and to save? That is a wonderful word in the margin of the 13th verse of the 8th Chapter of Daniel, where, in the midst of numbers and eras and periods affecting the Church and people of God, the marginal reading of the word "that certain saint" is "Palmoni", the wonderful Numberer. This is one of the titles of the Merchantman who came to buy that pearl of great price, for He has numbered His people and their troubles and has ordained every step of their way; He is the wonderful Numberer who has all their trials bestowed in His hands before they are placed upon the shoulders of His people.

In our text we have another view of Him concerning whom the Church is described elsewhere as His treasure, and as the pearl of great price, for the Apostle by the Holy Ghost describes the Church as a purchased flock. Now this is a figure which is well calculated by divine grace to be a help to God's little ones, for every member of this Church, every jewel in His treasure, everyone who is comprised in the one Body represented by the pearl of great price, is a member of a flock; one by one these lost sheep are found by their Shepherd and brought to the flock, to the fold, to the pastures, to the waters. He is the Good Shepherd, to whom this flock is His purchased treasure. I need hardly remind you that in Oriental lands a man's possessions often consisted entirely of his flocks or herds, and so "The Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance!" And never did a member of this flock come to Jesus who was not found by Him. Some of His sheep have been far off on the craggy mountains of awful sin, but the Shepherd found them, and those who have not been there, have also been lost sheep, for a sheep is a lost sheep when away from the Shepherd whether it be on the verge of an awful precipice, or in a place not outwardly so perilous. Everyone who comes to the Lord Jesus has been found by Him, for none have a desire after Him or come to Him as sinners full of need until He has sought them out and found them.

Now the Lord by the Apostle says, "Feed the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." To feed needs much teaching of the Holy Spirit, for very tender food is needed for lambs, the sweet invitations and gracious promises of Holy Writ; stronger pastures are needed for the older sheep, the covenant love and grace and faithfulness of the Lord our God and of His eternal purposes of mercy in the salvation of His people; then if need be, some bitter pastures now and then in the way of reproof with the aid of the Holy Spirit, but it is

the flock which is being fed, therefore all the reproofs must be spoken in love.

Contemplate what is the measure of the value of this flock, the Church, the flock purchased, bought, redeemed or bought back! Bought back of whom? NOT from Satan; no price was paid to him. We are redeemed from Satan by POWER (but that is quite a different phase of redemption) not bought back from Satan, but bought, purchased from the claims of God's law which we had broken, and from the penalty of His justice. God's righteous claims upon us were met by the Lord Jesus Christ, and the penalties which the justice of God pronounced upon us according to His law were all borne by Him who came to effect the great work of redemption. He fulfilled the Law, and He satisfied justice by which may be seen His active and passive righteousness.

But the PRICE. The measure of the value of a thing is to be gauged by the price paid for it, that is, in just and equitable dealings among men. Now what was the price that was paid for the pearl? What was the price paid for the treasure? "Feed the Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood." Is it not wonderful, stupendous! The value of the pearl is THE BLOOD OF HIM WHO IS GOD, the blood of God manifest in the flesh!

Now there is no other place in God's Word where the blood is set forth in a more solemn form and connection. It was the blood of the Man Christ Jesus, but in union with His human nature was His eternal Godhead, so that every drop of blood had all the dignity and infinite worth, and blessed power of the Godhead behind it, hence the Holy Ghost says here that we are purchased with His own blood! It is underlined as it were, "purchased with His own blood, even the blood of Emmanuel, God with us! Oh! that the Spirit of the living God would so work in our heart that we might know more and more of the power of this precious blood! Well might Joseph Hart speak of "Invaluable blood!" The "Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood!" God in the blood! God in every word that fell from the lips of Incarnate Love! God in every invitation that issued from Him! He is the great and glorious One, God manifest in the flesh, the great Numberer who is God, and who has redeemed the Church with His own blood. Oh! wonderful must be the destiny of the Church, wonderful must be the unveiling of Eternity! What is the Lord's "new Name"? We do not know, but it refers to the heavenly glory, and "My new name" represents the future unfoldings of the grace and glory of Him who has redeemed the pearl, and who will unfold, and unfold that new name during the ages of Eternity.

A SOLEMN CHARGE - "Take heed therefore unto yourselves." There is first of all the personal note, and then the pastoral. "Take heed unto yourselves", and then to the flock of God, the

Church which He hath redeemed with His own blood." "They made me the keeper of the vineyards." "Take heed unto yourselves". "I am busily engaged in the Lord's service, tract distributing, Sunday School teaching" says one, "I am a very earnest worker." But what about your own vineyard? "Take heed unto yourselves." Not one word must be said against service in the Lord, but, we must BE before we can work, and the overseers whom the Holy Ghost raises up and equips are those to whom He says "Take heed unto yourselves." Then "take heed" that you give the flock of God good food, for awful sickness among the sheep will be produced if they are put in the wrong pastures, and they will soon become sickly if their food is unclean. Feed them with the great truths of electing love, and all the blessed things that are in the everlasting Gospel.

"Take heed to yourselves", and may this be our thought! As the Apostle Paul admonishes "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men, and may we seek in whatever places the Lord may appoint us to do all as to the Lord and not unto men; then it matters not what the world thinks, or what the professing Church thinks, as long as we have the answer of a good conscience towards God.