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PEARLS OF GREAT PRICE

Our theme today is pearls, and I’d like to look at the old Parable of “The Pearl of Great Price” in a new and different way.

Matthew 13:45-46 45“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

The usual interpretation of this parable is that we are the merchant, searching for meaning and significance in life, and we find Jesus (or the Kingdom of God), recognise His value, and sell everything we have, and turn our backs on everything we hold dear, in order to be in the Kingdom. It is indeed true that finding Jesus Christ and the Kingdom is of great value, and worth more than anything else we have, and we should seek God’s Kingdom as our first priority in life. But there is another way of looking at it.

It could be questioned whether we really search for Jesus and the Kingdom, because we know that no one comes to Him unless God calls him. (John 6:44.) Do we really purchase the Kingdom, or Jesus, or does He purchase us?

1 Corinthians 6:20 “you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies.” He bought us, and the price was the blood of Jesus.

1 Peter 1:18-19 18“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, 19but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”

So we could look at the parable from a new angle, from the viewpoint that Jesus is the merchant, looking for pearls, who has sold all He has to buy the pearl of great value. He emptied Himself and became nothing (Philippians 2:7), giving up all He had to buy the pearl of great price.

In that case, what is the pearl of great price that He bought? Yes – you and me: we are pearls in His sight! Let’s talk about pearls for a while, and see what we can learn from them that we can apply in our Christian lives.

Here’s a quote from an article called “The History of Pearls” by Fred Ward.

“*Long known as the “Queen of Gems,” pearls possess a history and allure far beyond what today’s wearer may recognise. Throughout much of recorded history, a natural pearl necklace was a treasure of almost incomparable value, in fact the most expensive jewellery in the world. Now we see pearls almost as accessories, relatively inexpensive decorations to accompany more costly gemstones. Before the creation of cultured pearls in the early 1900’s, natural pearls were so rare and expensive that they were reserved almost exclusively for the noble and very rich. At the height of the Roman Empire, when pearl fever reached its peak, the historian Suetonius wrote that the Roman general Vitellius financed an entire military campaign by selling just one of his mother’s pearl earrings.*

*Pearls, in fact, played the pivotal role at the most celebrated banquet in literature. To convince Rome that Egypt possessed a heritage and wealth that put it above conquest, Cleopatra wagered Marc Antony she could give the most expensive dinner in history. The Roman reclined as the queen sat with an empty plate and a goblet of wine (or vinegar). She crushed one large pearl of a pair of earrings, dissolved it in the liquid, then drank it down. Astonished, Antony declined his dinner – the matching pearl – and admitted she had won.*

*The Arabs have shown the greatest love for pearls. The depth of their affection for pearls is enshrined in the Koran, especially within its description of Paradise, which says: “The stones are pearls and jacinths; the fruits of the trees are pearls and emeralds; and each person admitted to the delights of the celestial kingdom is provided with a tent of pearls, jacinths and emeralds; is crowned with pearls of incomparable lustre and is attended by beautiful maidens resembling hidden pearls*.”

**What are pearls?**

Quote from World Book Encyclopaedia: “*The Pearl is one of the most valuable gems. Large, perfectly shaped pears rank in value with the most precious stones. But pearls differ from other gems. Most gems are minerals that are mined from beneath the earth. But pearls are formed inside the shells of oysters. Mineral gems are hard and usually reflect light. But pearls are rather soft, and absorb, as well as reflect, light.*

*Oysters and other shell-forming molluscs make a special substance, called nacre (pronounced NAY kur), that lines the insides of their shells. This smooth lining is called the nacreous layer, or pearly layer, and is often lustrous. It is formed by certain cells in the body of the animal. When a foreign substance, such as the grain of a seed or a tiny parasite, enters the body of the mollusc, the nacre-forming cells begin to work. They cover the invading substance with thin sheets of nacre. They build successive circular layers of nacre until the foreign body is enclosed in the shell-like substance, forming the pearl.*”

So the first thing we can learn about ourselves by comparing Christians to pearls is:

1. **Pearls are formed from all kinds of junk, through suffering**.

Pearls are produced from common sand, bits of shell or bone, dead fish or debris that is trapped in the soft flesh of the oyster and becomes an irritant. The oyster responds by coating the grain of sand with layer upon layer of saliva and calcium, slowly forming the pearl as a product of pain and suffering.

We can learn a lesson here about our reaction to irritations entering our lives! All types of trials and problems arise, and the important thing isn’t the trial, but our reaction to it – the attitude we face these things with.

James 1:2 “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds.”

If only we could always have that attitude towards trials!

Verse 3 “because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.”

Good things are developed through trials and irritations.

Verse 4 “Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” The work of developing a pearl takes a number of years – until it becomes mature and beautiful.

In the early 1900’s, Kokichi Mikimoto in Japan came upon the idea of inserting pieces of material into oysters to entice them to produce pearls on demand. These are called cultured pearls, but still take a lot of work and time (7 years) to produce.

1 Peter 1:6-7 “In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

Trials cause us grief, but as we respond to the irritation by coating it with the beautiful fruits of God’s Spirit, especially with faith, the result is genuine character [in contrast to imitation pearls, made of coated glass beads]. The result is something of great value to Jesus Christ, causing praise, glory and honour!

This is what Jesus gave His life to purchase! We don’t turn ourselves into pearls, but Jesus provides the love, humility, faith and fruits of the Spirit. Jesus came to turn us into pearls!

Here’s a poem that describes the process…

The Oyster

There once was an oyster whose story I tell,

Who found that some sand had got into his shell.

It was only a grain, but it gave him great pain,

For oysters have feelings, although they’re so plain.

Now, did he berate the harsh workings of fate,

That had brought him to such a deplorable state?

Did he curse at the government, or cry for election?

And claim that the sea should have given him protection?

‘No,’ he said to himself as he lay in his shell.

‘Since I cannot remove it, I intend to improve it.”

Now the years have rolled round, as the years always do,

And he came to his ultimate destiny… stew!

And the small grain of sand that had bothered him so,

Was a beautiful pearl all richly aglow.

Now the tale has a moral, for isn’t it grand

What an oyster can do with a morsel of sand?

So what couldn’t we do if we’d only begin…

With some of the things that get under our skin?



*(All pictures from Google Images)*

In what other ways are pearls like Christians?

**2. They are of immense value.**

**3. They come in all shapes, sizes and colours, but they are all still pearls!**

Pearls occur naturally in a spectacular array of colours, ranging from white to gold, purple and black.



**4. We are like a pearl necklace in God’s sight.**

Different sizes – no one better than any other. The Holy Spirit is the thread binding us.

**5. Pearls absorb and reflect light.** Other precious gems reflect light brilliantly, but pearls are distinctive in that they are softer, and they absorb light as well.

An article here called “Treasures from the Deep” says: “They are not brittle, like diamonds. They are not brazen, like rubies. They are soft, forgiving. A good pearl ingests light, then offers it back, transformed.”

God describes us as the light of the world. We receive that light from Jesus Christ, who is also called the light of the world. We absorb it from Him, and then share it with others – we “offer it back, transformed.” We should be like beautiful pearls in the society around us.

Another article I read says: “*One of the most distinctive features of a natural pearl is the way it seems to glow from within. This property, known as lustre, gives pearls their unusual beauty. Lustre results from the reflection of light rays, not only off the surface of the pearl, but also off the concentric inner layers of nacre. Because a pearl’s surface is round, it acts as a convex mirror, reflecting light so that it appears to emanate from within the pearl. The multiple layers of nacre also give rise to the “iridescence” or “orient” of pearls – a characteristic that resembles the shimmer seen on a soap bubble. The layers of nacre act like tiny prisms, refracting light so that it appears as all the colours of the rainbow*.”

We can really reflect the light of God as Christians, if we have layers of Godly character inside us. Layers and layers of the fruits of the Spirit will reflect out of us so we have a sparkling incandescence or lustre!

Matthew 5:14-16 14“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

That’s our challenge.

This article, “Treasures from the Deep” also says: “*It is remarkable to think that something as beautiful (and valuable) as a pearl is produced by something as ugly as an oyster. When you hear the word “oyster”, you think entree. But these are large, mucus-lathered creatures, muscular and heavy. Their shells, which are broad – the width of a man’s hand from pinky to outstretched thumb – are pocked with growths and dents, and remind me of nothing so much as a slimy discus*.”

Yet pearls are cherished as symbols of purity and perfection, elegance and affluence!

What a transformation, from an oyster to a pearl! And so the article concludes:

*That is ultimately what this industry is all about. Transmutation. The pearl’s story is one of change and transformation.*

And that’s our story as Christians!

Here’s a quote from a recent article in “Challenge”. (‘Those Pearls of Wisdom’, by Margaret Curran.)

“*A missionary in India had an Indian pearl diver, named Rambhau, as one of his closest friends. Rambhau told David he had a son who was one of the best pearl divers on the Indian coast. He had a dream of finding the perfect pearl, and one day he did. It was one of the largest ever found off the Indian coast and was worth an enormous sum of money. Tragically though, it cost him his life, as he stayed under the water too long and died a few days later. Rambhau produced a box containing the brilliant, lustrous pearl. “My son gave his life for this pearl,” he told David, “and because I don’t know if I will ever return from Delhi, I want you to have it.” David protested strongly. He offered to pay for it. Rambhau exclaimed, “My only son gave his life to get this pearl, and I wouldn’t sell it for any amount. Its worth is in the life of the blood of my son. I cannot sell this – but I can give it to you. Just accept it as a token of the love I bear you*.”

It’s good to reflect on the way Jesus was like a merchant, selling all that He had to buy us with His precious blood, because He saw how we could be transformed from oysters into pearls! He did this because He truly loves us.

Notice Psalm 45:11 “Let the king be enthralled by your beauty; honour Him, for He is your lord.”

Isaiah 62:3 “You will be a crown of splendour in the Lord’s hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.”



Malachi 3:17 “On the day when I act,” says the Lord Almighty, “they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him.”

Zechariah 9:16 “The Lord their God will save His people on that day as a shepherd saves his flock. They will sparkle in His land like jewels in a crown.”

He looks on us like pearls of great price – He is enthralled by our beauty.

Matthew 13:43 (a couple of verses before the parable). “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

We will shine like precious pearls forever in the Kingdom.

We’ll be in the New Jerusalem, so it’s interesting to see something Revelation 21 says about this marvelous city:

Revelation 21:21 “The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.”

But the greatest pearls of all there will be the children of God, those who were transformed by the blood of Jesus from ugly oysters into sparkling pearls of great price!