

The parable of the Pearl of Great Price



45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls:

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

The main thrust of this parable is to show the supreme value of the Kingdom of God. It is designed to show how precious it is, how unique. How once it is discovered, everything else – which is still useful, and worthwhile to some degree, - just pales in comparison, and is no longer regarded or held in esteem.

The merchant man was used to trading in pearls, and especially looked out for ones that were of high grade, as they had an especially good value. Pearls are themselves hard to come by, but a very good quality one, is even more rare. So with the Kingdom of God. There are many Kingdoms. The history of the world has seen many kingdoms of men. That rise and fall. Some burst onto the scene, and overthrow all before them, but soon fade and decay. Others arise slowly, and the influence spreads far and wide – but again, they do not last. They are all kingdoms, but are all inferior to the Kingdom of heaven. The Kingdom – not in heaven – but of heaven.

The Kingdom of heaven is so named, because it belongs to heaven. It is a Kingdom based on a higher political level than the earthly kingdoms. It is based on heavenly principles, that pertain to God. As such it has qualities that far exceed that of the early kingdoms. It will last for ever – this is a quality that makes it unique of course. It is based on truth, equity and justice, and never deviates from that. It

has a ruler who is Eternal, and therefore does not change. There is no need for a change of governments, or a succession of rulers... no, the consistency and steadiness of the heavenly Kingdom gives all its subjects deep confidence and trust. The heavenly Kingdom is so powerful that it transforms lives, it gives hope, direction and purpose. It has no prejudice, bias or discrimination, it gives instead joy, happiness and blessing. Material possessions in these earthly kingdoms come and go, and are frivolous and petty in comparison. Once discovered then, the entrance to this Kingdom is so inspiring, giving such relief to the tortured soul, forgiveness to the sinful, lightness to those burdened down: Matthew 11:28-30 *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

As the crowds rush madly and headlong for promotion in the kingdoms of men, along the broad way to destruction, they miss the little door, obscured by piles of rubbish left by the wayside. The little door which once opened by an ancient key, reveals a small pathway rarely walked upon – Jesus said: Matthew 7:13-14 Enter through the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the way is spacious that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. How narrow is the gate and difficult the way that leads to life, and there are few who find it!

How much better is life than destruction? There is no comparison!! Of course not. If given the choice, of course everyone would seize hold of Life with both hands, and avoid Destruction with every ounce of fibre, with every straining muscle in their body! So why do people not all stampede through the little door?

It is because they do not understand, They are ignorant. They cannot see, they are blind.

The merchant could tell the difference between the goodly pearls and the Pearl of Great Price. To the uneducated, the average person

– they all look the same, but the Expert can tell the difference at a glance. He abandons all of the other pearls. They are no longer of any consequence. He has no further interest in them.

So it is when the Educated in the Word of God come across the Truth – the One Body of Christ, the one rare, so rare, and so small community of believers in the Pure Doctrine, with no corruption at all, no spot or blemish, reflecting the light, full of lustre, and utterly genuine – when that is found – all else is abandoned – *what does hinder me to be baptised?* (Acts 8:36) It is as Jesus taught in Matthew 6 the concerns of those seeking the kingdoms of men to be focussed of what they eat, what they drink, what they wear: but those who have the Pearl of Great Price – nothing else really matters anymore, so Jesus says 31 -33: *Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knows that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

Jesus in his parables reveals how knowledgeable he was, although he never bragged or showed off his knowledge. Not everyone knew much about the Pearl Industry in his day. Pearls were a luxury item that the poor knew very little about. But in fact the Romans depended on the Pearl Industry – amongst other industries to underpin the Empires economy. Interestingly, writings by Suetonius, the biographer of Julius Caesar, suggest that Julius Caesar's invasions of Britain in 55 BC and 54 BC were in part motivated by a desire to harvest Scotland's freshwater pearls. (Today Scotland is home to approximately half of the world's freshwater pearl mussels)

Pliny in his 1st-century A.D. book "Historialis Naturalis" referred to the pearl fisheries at Tylos (Bahrain) and Catifa (Al-Qatif) and said, *"But the most perfect and exquisite pearls of all others be they that are gotten about Arabia within the Persian Gulf.* Isidore of Charax, a

Greek geographer, wrote in the 1st-century A.D. that "*in the Persian Gulf is found a certain island, where pearls are found in abundance.*"

African slaves, stolen by Arab slave traders along the Eastern African seaboard via Zanzibar, were the favoured Pearl divers.



Life expectancy as a pearl diver was short. It wasn't a nice job.

Typically the slave diver would work from dawn to dusk diving down to mussel and oyster beds grabbing shells and putting into small bags and rising again to hand

them over. A ton of shellfish would be required to find a small handful of pearls. The shellfish beds in the Middle East coincide with areas well used by sharks! The work was dangerous, arduous, difficult and unpleasant, hands were scratched and ripped by sharp rock edges and the shells themselves. But this was the lengths some people would go to. Discovering a pearl, would often result in a slave being given his freedom. There is an obvious spiritual lesson here.

Pearls are small round hard stones made of iridescent (light reflecting) nacre (a word which means shiny). They are found inside two types of mollusc – oysters and mussels. There are about 85,000 known types of mollusc (which includes snails, slugs and squids amongst others) but only 20 of these have the shiny shells needed to make pearls. These shiny shells are found right at the bottom of the sea, or river – for freshwater mussels. They live amongst the mud and darkness. The beauty of the shell is inside, unappreciated and cannot be seen. Instead the hardness of the shell is to prevent the mollusc being eaten! Drab and even ugly on the outside, amongst mud and filth.

But Beauty can be found occasionally amongst the mud and filth in the great sea of nations. Only God can see it. He is the One who knows exactly where it is, and rescues it and opens up the hard outer shell, to expose the beauty of a humble and obedient character within.

But why are pearls found inside these creatures? They are formed and grow inside the shell. The reason that pearls are created is that when foreign things, such as small bits of seaweed or tiny crabs get stuck in a mollusc, the mollusc will defend itself by covering the intruding object with the same material with which it makes its shell. When something intrudes the human body, we get a spot or a temperance. Molluscs on the other hand protect themselves by wrapping the intruder with their shell which, some of the time, can be beautifully shiny resulting in a pearl.

This is exactly why God has respect and appreciate the beauty of the heart of a believer. Deep within a receptive man or woman, unseen by anyone else, the Pearl of Great Price is formed. Normally with most people when we get irritated by even something so small, we blow it up out of all proportion and explode with rage. That is not pretty or a thing of beauty, it is ugly and belongs at the bottom of the sea. But when a person remains calm and sensitive, and carefully wraps that irritant up, so it causes no harm to others, with the very material the Creator has given – it starts a chain reaction of learned behaviour which is quite wonderful and attractive, and is extremely rare. God is the Expert. He knows exactly what He is looking for.



Often the pearls produced are not much to look at. Most have blotches, and although shiny have no lustre. Only one in a thousand shells will produce a shell of gem quality.

But then there are pearls and Pearls of Great Price. Pearls are valued by size, shape, colour and lustre. The bigger they are – the longer they have been growing the rarer they are. The perfectly round ones are extremely rare. Ones that reflect light with a sharpness creating a rainbow effect are the ones of Great Price. Pearls can vary in price from £30.00 each to over £16,000.00 – and above!



Now with this information we can see the wisdom of the Lord Jesus, and he turned his knowledge and produced this wonderful little parable. How apt is the choice of subject to compare it to the Kingdom of Heaven.

There are many who purport to have the Kingdom of Heaven in their possession. On inspection what they have is nice. Warm and friendly. Reflective of the word of God in some aspects, but blotches and blemishes can be noticed, doctrines such as the Trinity, or speaking in tongues or faith healing mean that the pearl they are holding is only a trinket, a bauble. Not worth much. Then you see others which are out of shape. Not balanced. Bad behaviour such as stealing, or other such sins are not condemned and acted upon.

Then there suddenly you chance upon the One. Perfectly balanced between faith and works, pure white, the righteousness of the saints, and the lustre is glorious. Sharp focus, absorbing and refracting light to create a rainbow effect, splitting the light, to reveal multiple good characteristics, like the pattern seen on the veil in the tabernacle of the bow which God set in the cloud to declare His covenant with all men. With shaking hands we embrace this unspeakable gift, this treasure, knowing it will transform our life for ever, the key to freedom from slavery, no need to dive anymore to the murky depths, nothing else matters, tomorrow will take care of itself.

Or do we. Jesus gave this parable to make people think. In fact, most people just give a glance, and just jump straight back in to their rummaging in the filth. How often do we forget about the knowledge of the Word of God and instead of allowing the Kingdom of Heaven to reflect from us, we may well just allow that Life Changing Gem just pass out of our grasp and lose it forever.

Brother Terry