

Coach House Church

BEACONS

HIDDEN TREASURES DIAMONDS AND PEARLS

18TH MAY 2021

I saw a TV programme recently about hidden treasures where the presenter had travelled across the world to discover treasures we all recognize but may not have considered much about their origins.

Did you know that coal, graphite (pencil lead) and diamonds are basically formed from the same things – pure carbon? You would never call coal or graphite a treasure or think that it could be described as priceless: useful and often essential but not something of beauty. However, diamonds through the ages and over the world are recognised as precious and valuable.

In order for carbon to crystallise in the form of a diamond, this requires tremendous temperatures of around 1000 degrees and pressures that are 50,000 times greater than the atmospheric pressure we know on earth. The only place this exists is deep below the crust of the earth-around 100 miles down. They are formed, hidden from view. Then the crystals are transported nearer to the surface via a volcanic pipeline. The rare event of a volcanic eruption adds to the rarity of the diamonds and mining is still involved to access many of them. You can see why they are so expensive, and often classed as priceless, as so much effort has gone into their formation.

Another treasure that can be found hidden away from view, hidden inside a mollusk, is a pearl. The hard, protective exterior of the mollusk can't stop small particles from getting inside, to the soft interior. It's a bit like getting grit in your eye but the mollusk has a brilliant way of dealing with this irritant. It forms a protein and mineral sac around it called nacre (nay-car) which builds up in layers. We know these layers as mother of pearl which has that iridescent quality,

appearing to change colour as we look at it from different directions. The layers however, harden and become the pearl itself. The more layers, the bigger the pearl and the more rare and expensive it is.

The bible talks about another form of hidden treasure in 2 Corinthians chapter 4. In these verses, we are described as being like jars of clay. At the time of writing, large clay jars were used to store and protect precious artefacts such as scrolls or valuable commodities such as flour or oil, to protect them from extremes of temperature or from contamination. The dead sea scrolls were found inside such jars, preserved in various states for hundreds of years. The point is that the jar is just ordinary clay but inside is the thing of great value. Inside us is God's holy spirit, our comforter and guide, our confirmation of God's presence in us. Our bodies may be temporary and fragile, prone to cracks and breaks but the inner being is eternal. It is God's Holy Spirit within us that gives us hope and helps us to keep going when the times are tough.

Neither pearls nor diamonds begin as the finished product. It takes effort, pressure, heat or irritation as part of a long process to complete the finished product.

The passage in Corinthians was written at a time when the new Christians were under pressure. Their new faith based on the teachings of Jesus was viewed with at least scepticism and at most by opposition or even persecution. Yet, like the irritant within the mollusk, or the extreme heat on the diamond, they are determined not to be sidetracked and give up. The early followers of Jesus were resolute, continuing to spread Jesus' message because in the long term, they knew it would provide eternal benefits to the people who listened, believed and trusted.

Further on in Corinthians 4 it says:

16 That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are[el] being renewed every day. 17 For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! 18 So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

Those early disciples would have agreed with Corrie Ten Boom when she said:

"Jesus did not promise to change the circumstances around us. He promised great peace and pure joy to those who would learn to believe that God actually controls all things." ~ Corrie Ten Boom

David Wilkerson, founder of the addiction recovery programme, Teen challenge, said:

"Our faith is not meant to get us out of a hard place or change our painful condition. Rather, it is meant to reveal God's faithfulness to us in the midst of our dire situation." ~ David Wilkerson

Without the tough process, we would never have pearls or diamonds. Without experiencing difficult circumstances in our lives we would not fully appreciate the grace of God or the closeness of the Holy Spirit.

In Matthew 13 there is a parable that talks about a man finding treasure in a field, discovering something so precious that he sold everything in order to buy the field and own the treasure it held. And further, it tells of a merchant who sells everything to buy the one pearl that he has found that is of great value. Through these parables, Jesus was telling the people that there are some things that are worth giving up for everything else.

At first glance, we can see this as focusing on the important things of life, that is, not on earthly riches, but of giving up transient earthly things for the eternal promises of Heaven. This is demonstrated in Matthew 19 and Matthew 6.

In Matthew 19 Jesus speaks to a rich young man who asks how to live forever. And when Jesus tells him to sell his possessions, this is a step too far for him, as he was so rich. So he leaves in a quandary with no decision made. While we may appreciate riches or treasures on this earth, it is important to look beyond the here and now.

And in Matthew 6, Jesus says:

19 "Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. 21 Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. There is another meaning to the parable though. It is that we are God's treasure that he was willing to give up everything to buy us back. God was willing to allow

Jesus to give up his life, to be the pure acceptable sacrifice on our behalf. Without this we could not receive forgiveness and enjoy God's grace and mercy.

John 3:16 sums this up:

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life”



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