



# SUNDAY READING

## SERMON.

One Pearl of Great Price.

SERMON BY REV. F. L. CHAPPELL, preached at Bridgeport, Conn.

An English nobleman, in the time of Queen Elizabeth laid a wager with the Spanish Ambassador at court that he would give a more costly dinner than could be had there. We can well suppose that either noble was loaded with the richest viands. But the Englishman won by a cunning device. He dissolved a pearl worth sixty or seventy thousand dollars in a glass of wine, and, during the dinner, drank it to the health of the Queen.

That one pearl of great price won the wager. The idea was not original with this man, for the ancients indulged in this same extravagant folly. The Emperor Caligula is said to have in like manner, drank a pearl worth nearly forty thousand, and that princess of voluptuaries, Queen Cleopatra, in one of her feasts with Antony, is reported to have quaffed a pearl worth three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. We are not to infer from these facts that pearls are chiefly used for drinking purposes, but rather that when one seeks for something of rare value he may fix upon the pearl—the peculiar but precious pearl. A merchant man seeking goodly pearls is in pursuit of some of the richest products that earth affords. And if he finds one pearl of so great a price that he is willing to surrender all else for it, he has indeed found something that we may be pardoned for calling priceless. And this is the figure used in the text to denote the excellence and value of perfected humanity as seen in the church. That, which another scripture represents as a beautiful bride clothed in white, or a glorious city whose streets are gold, and whose gates are pearls, is here represented as one pearl of great price. Christ is the merchant man seeking goodly pearls, and as he scans the creation through, man appears to him the richest thing and he sells all—gives up his heavenly glory that he may be possessed of this treasure. And when in the fulness of time he shall gather together in one body the redeemed from the earth and make that body his bride, pure, precious, chaste, beautiful, strong; he will have secured for himself this one pearl of great price.

Let our subject, then, be, perfected humanity or, the church of Christ illustrated by the pearl.

1. And first—as to the place where it was fashioned. These pearls that shine in the halls of wealth and culture, adorning the noblest beauty of the land—whence came they? In what bright region or sunlit clime did they grow? They seem like the product of the skies. Indeed some of the ancients professed to believe the pretty conceit that they originated in the dew drops that fell into the ocean. But in point of fact they have origin in the hidden depths of the dark waters, within the rugged, close embrace of the unsightly shell-fish. Far down below the light and life of this air-filled and sun-lit region, in the close, dense, dark recesses of earth's under-world the pearl is formed. Far, far away from the scenes of its final display is it fashioned. And how like this is it with the souls of men! Down deep in the dense darkness of this sinful and sorrowing world are the souls of saints fashioned. Far enough away from the bright heaven for which they are fitting. Dark and dense is the clime that bears them! Close and hard is the embrace that holds them; rough and rugged the walls that enclose them. We may not perhaps fully appreciate the fact, since we have not known any better mode of existence. But oh, who is there that does not long and yearn for more light and more freedom than we now enjoy? We instinctively feel that there must be some better place for us. And there is. This world has, indeed, a sort of beauty of its own, as the depths of the sea have a sort of beauty of its own. But as much superior as is this free, sun-lit scene to the close dim depths of the ocean so much better is the heavenly than the earthly state. There, there, in light we shall shine; but here, here in darkness we are fashioned.

2. But in the second; the pearl illustrates perfected humanity as to the method of formation. How grows the pearl? Easily, naturally, quickly? Does it bloom and ripen like flower or fruit, according to the common courses of nature? Does it insensibly gather like the dew drop that trembles on the gossamer web? Does it form in a single night like the frost spangle that glistens in the morning sun? or in any of the easy, ordinary, swift ways of nature does it come to the birth? No, by none of these common methods. But strangely, slowly, painfully, by one of the most curious processes with which we are acquainted, the pearl is formed in the hidden enclosure of the mollusk.

Wonderful, yea, supernatural, is the process by which from such gross, grovelling creatures as we are by nature, such splendid angelic beings as we shall be by grace, are evolved. And how slow the process. How microscopic the increments of holy character and being! How little we seem to change from day to day and from year to year. But it is those minutely thin layers in the formation of the pearl that give it its peculiar way beauty. So doubtless, God's slow methods make an excellence in us that is peculiarly delightful to the gaze of the heavenly eyes. And how painful the process too. How sensibly we need to be touched, yea, hurt, before we properly turn our lives to anything higher than what the world and nature afford! How the old man must die that the new man may thrive! And how sorely painful much of the transformation is! How many tears, how many prayers, how many sighs, before we come to be in the eyes of our Master, a pearl of great price!

3. But, third, the pearl illustrates per-

fecting humanity as to the manner of its recovery and revelation. The pearl, however excellent it may be in itself has no proper appreciation or appropriate use until it is revealed—until it is brought from its hidden home up into the light and use of the world. Pearls in the sea shells or scattered on the bottom of the ocean, are of little avail. But those that know their worth brave these inhospitable depths for their recovery. It is a venturesome plunge that the pearl diver makes when he goes to search for these treasures of the deep. See him as he sits on the side of the rocking boat meditating the descent. The world is all bright and inviting about him. The air which he breathes is his native element. Below him are the dim depths, with the close, deathly weight of waters, where no human being can long survive. Why should he leave this region for that? Ah! the pearls are there. And so seizing the sinking-stone he attaches it to his foot and plunges in. Down, down into the oppressive depths he sinks and gathers as many as possible of the pearl shells; and then, at a given signal, he is raised to the free world above, and up he comes into the light of day with his pearly treasures, which now for the first time reveal their true beauty in the light of a clear world, and are gazed upon with intelligent and appreciative eyes. They were pearls, indeed, before, but now they are revealed as such. And how this reminds us of the descent of Christ from heaven into the depths of this lower region and the darkness and oppression of sin. How it reminds us of his taking hold on humanity and, not only turning it into his own likeness, but bringing it up into the realm of the heavens. He did this first in his own person; and in time he will do it in the persons of all the saved. Without this descent and ascent there is no complete salvation. Not only is a transformation of character necessary, but also a transference of abode, revealing that character, in order that humanity may appear as the pearl of great price. And this can never be effected except through the descent and ascent of the heavenly agencies. Even if one could make himself pure he would not secure salvation thereby. Whoever saw a pearl self-raised and self-set—a pearl in proper place without other agencies than its own? We need not only to become pearls, but to appear as pearls. Hence, the necessity for the future descent of Christ to take us up to our true place and reveal us in our true light. As John says, "Beloved, now are we the Sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, who he shall see him as he is." We not only receive the witness of the Spirit that we are the children of God, but we wait for our manifestation as the Sons of God. Hence the cry, "Come Lord Jesus." Descend and lay hold on us with resurrection power and let us be seen as the pearl of great price.

4. But fourth, the pearl illustrates perfected humanity as to its excellent texture and beauty. Once brought up to the light of the surface world compared with natural products here, and scanned by intelligent and tasteful eyes, it is seen to be among the chief of beauties. Its shape, its color, its substance, its manner of formation, all serve to make it a unique excellence, a superior treasure. It is smooth, so white, so chaste, so pure, that it carries with it a sort of holy sentiment. Then, too, the minutely thin layers, of which it is formed, dispose their wavy edges in such a manner as to make it exhibit all the colors of the rainbow, as if, though formed in the dark, it had an anticipative and wonderful adaptation to the light. And thus, we are assured, will perfected men be found when they shall have been brought up out of earthly darkness into the pure light of heaven, gazed upon and judged by angelic eyes. It will then be seen that this strange lower world product is wonderfully perfect, eminently pure, gloriously beautiful and grandly strong. Formed in darkness and through suffering, yet watched over by infinite wisdom it has been so conformed that it reflects all the several glories of the Sun of righteousness—all the attributes of the divine nature, and shines forth as a peculiar treasure in the kingdom of God.

5. And thus we are brought to observe, in the fifth place that the pearl illustrates perfected humanity as to its use or the place it will occupy in the kingdom of God—the pearl once formed, once found, once revealed and appreciated readily takes its appropriate place of highest honor amid the treasures of sovereigns and millionaires; in the crowns of kings; in the necklaces of queens; on the bosoms of brides; and in every most honorable and precious place may the pearl be found. Thus it is that the product of the dark ocean depths finds its way to the richest and most honored places and uses that the world affords. And thus also it is with perfected humanity—those that come from the lower world of sin and darkness find their way to the most honorable positions in the heavenly regions. The church becomes the bride of the Lord, sits with him on His throne judging the worlds and the angels. Saved humanity occupies the highest place. All things are put under its feet. It is reckoned the most precious treasure. Its language and imagery were ever taxed, they are in the Scripture to express the exceeding precious estimation in which saved humanity is regarded by the Lord. Indeed, so high is the place to which we are destined, that it is difficult to awaken a practical faith in the blessed fact—"What," said Paul to the bickering and low-minded brethren of his time, "know ye not that ye shall judge angels? To whatever holy heights and offices Christ ascends, we ascend likewise for we shall be like Him and with Him. Thus have I held up before you perfected humanity as illustrated by the pearl—we have noted the place of its origin; the method of its formation; the manner of its recovery; the texture and beauty of its substance; and the honor and exaltation of its use.

And now let us gather up and utter some of the practical thoughts that are suggested by this, as it may seem, rather fanciful comparison.

1. And first we are impressed with the mystery and wisdom of God's ways. It is a strange place and a strange method that gives us the pearl. And it is a strange way in which the Lord leads us in order to make us the pearl of great price. He is fitting us for high destiny, but He is forming us in a low place.

Let us be sure that we follow God's ways, however mysterious they may be.

2. But, second, we are strongly impressed with the worth of the soul. If Christ regards it so highly, if He so sought for it, if He so honors it, how very precious it must be! This one pearl of great price! And why, then, do we neglect it so! Putting everything before it, while He puts it before everything. "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul"—if he shall scrape together bushels of pebbles and shells and lose the pearl of great price!

3. But, third, we see the meaning of the yearnings, longings and ambitions that burn within us. How restless we are! How insatiate and hungry our souls are! And why? Because we were made for greatness. Because we are destined for Godhood. But how vainly we sometimes beat about here in this close cage of our under world, striving to satisfy ourselves with what this narrow region affords. Never can it be done, no more can a pearl find its true place in the shell at the bottom of the ocean, than a heaven-born soul can be satisfied with the world.

4. But, fourth, we learn that the present state is not our true and proper world, we shall never know what we are, till by Christ's resurrection power we are raised into the light and generally superior condition of our own true world, and are judged by the aid of its true revelations.

5. But, in the fifth place, we are taught to be wary of any professed religion, which is all easy and natural, having no pain and death in it. The shell-fish suffers and dies, passes through a process which is not according to nature in order to produce the pearl. And just so is it with men that are truly redeemed. Christ's religion, so far as this world is concerned, is a cross-bearing religion. He says, "If any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

The shell-fish is worth something, as a shell-fish, to be sure. You can buy them for a cent a piece, or perhaps two for a cent when you go to a restaurant for your lunch. But when through months and years the oyster has died into the pearl, it is worth perhaps thousands of dollars. The natural easy going life is worth something, but it is as nothing in comparison to what it is worth when redeemed, transformed into the pearl of great price.

But in the sixth place we learn the need of patience, for the pain and discipline is for a purpose. "The light affliction which is but for a moment—that is, according to God's eternal ages—it does not seem light nor but for a moment to us now, yea, rather, it may seem heavy and long continued, but, as God views it—this light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, therefore we must run with patience the race that's set before us. If our discipline hurts, let it hurt—for even here unto we were called—this is what we need in order to become the pearl of great price. And this is a work that cannot always be quickly done. Let God take His own time with you. Don't spoil the work by hurrying it too fast. Patience makes the pearl.

7. But, seventh and last, we see the necessity of having a true and vivid idea of the day of our deliverance and revelation in our true character in the world to come. The pearl is never known as a pearl till it is brought up to the surface world; here it finds its true place. And we shall never be known as the sons of God till we emerge in the resurrection or glorified state. It is to be feared that the coming world, or age to come, is not as vivid in the hopes and aspirations of some of God's people as it ought to be, on the one hand, they place too much expectation on the life that now is, talking of the progress of society and civilization as though a kind of perfection were attainable in the flesh. And, on the other, they lay too much stress on the happy condition of naked souls resting in paradise. But the scriptures ever lead us on to the day of the Lord, and the age to come, when we shall be revealed as the sons of God—when we shall not only be, but also appear as the pearl of great price, possessed by the Lord as the reward of His toil. We were made for Him and He can never properly possess us till we are made like Him. As He is in the resurrection or glorified state, so must we be before we find our true place. He is the pattern to which we must be conformed. And when He shall appear, then, shall we also appear with Him in glory. This is our earnest supplication.

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**A Communion Prayer of St. Augustine.**  
Lord Jesus Christ, who hast said with Thine own sacred lips, "Whoso hungereth and thirsteth let him come unto Me, and I will give him food and drink that he will never hunger or thirst again;" O Lord, here cometh to Thee a needy soul, hungering and thirsting for Thy food, and for the drink of everlasting righteousness and blessedness. O Thou Bread of Life! feed my hunger with Thy true body! O Thou Fountain of Life! water and refresh my soul with Thy blood! that I, being strengthened and quickened, may rise out of this valley of sorrow unto Heaven, where Thou sittest at the right hand of the Father, and representest us: where, without hunger or thirst, in everlasting joy and blessedness, I shall praise Thee, with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and forever. Amen.

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