

LIKE A MERCHANT SEEKING PEARLS

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Excerpted from “The Pearl of Great Price—Conjugal Love”

“[T]he kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it”
(Matthew 13:44-46).

Coming into heaven is not easy. By our heredity, we incline to evils of every kind. We are born into love of self and the world. It is only through a lifetime of struggling with temptations that our lives are finally brought into order, and we become truly human. But a wise person keeps seeking what is good and true. He perseveres in this spiritual quest because he knows in his heart that the reward is worth the effort. He knows he will never be at peace until he finds it.

The Lord compared the kingdom of heaven to a hidden treasure and to a pearl of great price. But the dream and the reality are two different things. The dream is not realized without effort, without seeking. As fairy tales involve seeking something—an answer, a treasure, or the hero’s beloved—so spiritual life involves a quest, and combat—combat with one’s self.

Paradoxically, the path to heaven is not so hard as people imagine (see *Heaven and Hell* 528, 530, 533, 359). Yet many fail to find it. The difficulty is not in the path itself, but comes from our hereditary love of things which are against heaven. We know these things stand between us and happiness, but still we love them. The Lord, though, has given us the Word and established His church so that we might live the life that leads to heaven.

We can do this; we can find the way back to that first heavenly state, but we have to be like the merchant who is seeking valuable pearls. We have to be able to recognize the pearl of great price when we find it and be willing to forsake all else for its sake. To know the source of happiness is a great thing; to be willing to sacrifice all else in the quest for it is even greater. It is a rare gift. Too many people don’t know, or else they aren’t willing to make that sacrifice of the self.

The Lord is the only source of happiness and a “pearl” in the Word means knowledge of the Lord. Of all the treasures of the human mind, this is the pearl of great price (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 727, 916e). Knowledge of the Lord is what introduces us into His kingdom on earth and in heaven. If we are merchants seeking such pearls, we know where to look.

But what is this knowledge, really? We can know about the Lord, and still not know Him. For there is a deeper kind of knowledge than knowing about, which is knowing from experience. The pearl of great price is a knowledge of the Lord from having experienced His presence and the life of His kingdom. We must seek this living knowledge. We must actively seek to understand the truths which the Lord has revealed and make them our own by living by them. We have to go along the path which the Lord has revealed in His Word in order to find this hidden treasure.

We are told that “all instruction is simply an opening of the way” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1495:2). The reason for learning about the life of heaven is so that we might live it, and so come into heaven. We learn about heavenly things externally, as knowledge comes into our natural minds from without (from the Word). But as we strive to live by these knowledges, an internal

perception is opened up, and good from the Lord flows in and changes our ruling loves from natural and selfish to spiritual and heavenly. All the knowledges of the Lord's kingdom which we acquire are like good pearls, but this internal perception, and the charity it springs from, is the pearl of great price.

A pearl is a good symbol for heaven for several reasons. First of all, a pearl is a kind of living gem, in that it grows in a living creature. And the life of heaven is something that has to grow with us, little by little. The way a pearl is formed is significant too. It grows around a grain of sand irritating the oyster. We can compare this to the way the truths of the Word, as they come into our natural minds and are seen at first only naturally, are irritating to our selfish nature. But as they are covered over with charity, as it were, they become beautiful pearls.

Unlike gemstones with sharp facets, the pearl is round. Both its shape and color suggest gentleness and peace. The radiance of a pearl is different from other gems; it is soft and milky. There is something mysterious about it too—the way the iridescent sheen of a pearl shows many colors, very subtly. The soft and multi-hued luster of a pearl seems a good representation for knowledge of the Lord. We have a feeling that this knowledge has many layers of depth in it and that there is an opaqueness about it, as well as light.

And of course pearls are rare and precious; genuine pearls cannot be made by human hands. We can only know the Lord as we are liberated from self-love and self-intelligence. This is what is meant by the merchant selling all that he had to buy the pearl of great price. To know the Lord is to love what is good and true, to love this more than ourselves, to invest everything in it. This is to “lay up treasure in heaven.”

Love to the Lord is not an abstraction. The Lord is Human, and from Him come all genuinely human qualities. To love what is good and true means to love what is good and true in others. This is why love of the neighbor is “like unto” love of the Lord (Matthew 22:39). The Divine love and wisdom which come from the Lord can be seen when they are received and manifested in the lives of human beings. So to love the neighbor is to love the good in him from the Lord.

We know about the Lord through the Word. We come to know Him through experiencing the human qualities which flow from His Divine love and wisdom, and which affect our minds and lives and those of others. The Lord has given His church a necklace of precious pearls—that is, truths concerning Himself and heaven. These truths form the connection between heaven and earth. Knowledge of them opens heaven to us, or, rather, opens us to heaven and leads us there. When we receive these truths, love them and bring them into life, they are then part of the union of the Lord and His church.

This may involve considerable effort. It may be that many things will have to be forsaken for the sake of this end. There may be many obstacles to overcome, and in times of frustration or failure, it may seem as if the quest is hopeless. We may be inclined now and then to give up. But whatever price we have to pay on earth, we will be laying up treasure in heaven.

Amen.

Lessons: Genesis 2:4-25; Matthew 19:1-12; *Conjugal Love* 130:1,4