

One Precious Pearl: God's Design for His Church

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A book-length exposition on just two verses of the New Testament, *One Precious Pearl* offers the reader an indepth analysis of Jesus' parable of the merchant seeking goodly pearls.

Turning to Matthew 13, where seven parables of Jesus are recorded, Russell (*Thy Will Be Done on Earth*, 2008) focuses his attention on the two verses (13: 45 and 46) containing the parable of the merchant. The merchant finds one especially valuable pearl and sells everything he has in order to possess that single precious gem. According to Russell, compared to the other parables—especially that of the sower, the mustard seed, the weeds among the wheat, the yeast, and the hidden treasure in the field—this elusive idea about a merchant searching for a pearl has not received the full explication that it deserves. Russell fears that even those theologians who have studied this parable have overlooked some of its more salient points. In writing this book, Russell aims to give these two verses their full due and thereby make the parable of the pearl as central to the Christian imagination as is the parable of the mustard seed and the sower.

That Russell's explication is exhaustive there can be little doubt. Asserting that the one precious pearl is analogous to God's universal Church, Russell explores everything from the chemical composition of a natural pearl to its perceived value throughout history to describe in detail how each and every aspect of a pearl correlates to the creation of God's Church. From an oyster's point of view, for example, Russell sees the development of a pearl as a result of the oyster's suffering. A foreign object (i.e., a grain of sand) enters into the oyster's environment, and it is the oyster's reaction to that intrusion that ultimately results in the creation of a lustrous gem. Given the proper environment, what originally starts as an irritant can become something wondrous to behold.

Though Russell's parsing of the pearl analogy is extensive, the book remains solidly grounded in the land of the laity, making it accessible to virtually anyone who picks it up. One does not have to be a biblical scholar to grasp Russell's claim that a pearl is the result of a living creature, as the universal Church is the result of a living savior. Nor does one have to be versed in Hebrew to share Russell's idea that the spherical shape of a pearl symbolizes the unity of God's Church, which cannot be divided without destroying it. Nor does one even have to attend services regularly to follow Russell's contention that the perfection of a natural pearl, like the universal Church, is unattainable through manmade interventions. The ideas may be profound, but Russell's delivery is not.

A simple but intelligent analysis of an often overlooked parable in the New Testament, *One Precious Pearl* can be appreciated by a wide range of readers, none of whom will ever look at a pearl quite the same again.

DIANE TAYLOR (January 6, 2011)

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