

The

# Hidden Treasure

Nathan Pitchford

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# The Hidden Treasure

## 1. Introduction





AT THE beginning of the second chapter of the book of Proverbs, King Solomon, instructed by the Holy Spirit, admonishes those who would be his spiritual children how they might find wisdom, what value it should hold forth to them, to what advantages they may put it, and the means by which they should seek it, under the figure of hidden treasure, or a vein of silver buried in a hillside. It is at once manifest, by this colorful mode of expression, that Solomon intends to paint wisdom as that which one might spend all his time and strength in pursuing, to good effect. For just as hidden gold, being so much valued by men that they are willing to exchange for it all necessary goods, services, amusements, etc., well rewards all efforts spent in procuring it, so wisdom, when one once has it, is profitable to any spiritual end, providing strength and joy, blessing and prosperity, and the manner and means of ordering one's life suitably for his eternal good. For this reason, it is not at all amiss for a man to spend his days searching for hidden gold, if he has a reasonable suspicion that he might find it in such a place as he is digging, for he looks ahead to the value which it shall afford him, which should more than make up for his labors expended in procuring it. But if it be so advantageous to seek gross

earthly profit assiduously, of how much more industry ought we to avail ourselves in seeking that which offers us the most divine and inextinguishable pleasures of heaven, seeing that we have clearly been directed to the place where we might find it indeed?

Let us then lay to heart the king's exhortation, and apply ourselves to pursue this wisdom of which he speaks. But we must first assure ourselves that, if we would be successful in our pursuit, we must be singleminded and not inclined to grow weary at the first breath of disappointment. The wisdom of which Solomon speaks is never the property of the sluggard or haphazard seeker. Such as these may easily find that which they think to be wisdom, and they may fool half the world with their glittery baubles, but when they put them to the fire for refinement, they will be at once consumed, and all the profit they had hoped to derive thereby will be utterly vanished away. The true gold is not so easily found as that, and it requires, in exchange for the possession of it, one's entire life: his ambitions, thoughts, desires, energies, and even his own soul. No man, having put his hand to the miner's pick, and having then turned aside to the shade-tree for the passing delights of a mid-day

feast and careless carousing, will be counted worthy of the treasure. He must cry out for it with all his might, search for it with all his skill, bear the heat of the day when others are enjoying their leisure, and even as Jacob struggled with the Angel, wrestle with God in fervent prayers, not letting him go until the desired blessing is given.

But not only must these means be diligently used; they must likewise be joined to a passive and humble receptivity of spirit, which acknowledges that all good things come down as a free gift from the Father of Lights. The gold of his word must be received and laid to heart, just as the wise son receives the instructions of his father, and puts them to use in ordering his affairs. The one who rejects counsel for the impulses of his own heart will soon find himself in desperate straits, and the one who seeks for wisdom anywhere else than from the free and bountiful hand of God will waste his life in pursuing fleeting will-o-the-wisps, and find himself sinking at the end of the day in the miry marshes, with nothing of substance left to hold onto.

How many lives have been cast into eternal ruin because one or the other of these principles has

been forgotten! Many wicked men, who have grown up in the embrace of right religion, never reject it outwardly, and will readily admit that it is in the word of God that all happiness is to be found, but because they are lazy, and do not value it enough, and have not seen how satisfying it is, and desire instead the ephemeral delights of the world, they do not seek the treasure where their lips confess that it is to be had, and ultimately find themselves penniless paupers, naked, blind, and wretched. Many others are seeking truth and wisdom, but as it were of their own strength and prudence, and so they cast off the clear directives of God's word, and trundle off to some false field, where nothing is hidden but dust and stones, and waste their lives playing games in the mud, and hoping people will consider them wise and rich for the skill with which they construct their sand castles. If we would find the true riches of wisdom, let us avoid both of these false paths, and crying out to God alone for his free gift of the Spirit, let us apply to his word with diligence and skill, for that is the pathway which leads to glory.

We have seen the cost of finding this hidden treasure, and noted that it does not come to the casual observer, but is reserved for him who gives

up his whole life in exchange for it. What then is its value, and how do the benefits it confers upon its possessor measure up to the price which is given for it? Under normal principles, any commodity that demands from a man his whole life as its price must be a foolish transaction indeed! But the paradox of the gospel is this: it demands everything, but gives unspeakably more than it required; for it takes only that which is imperfect and broken down, and replaces it with what is perfect and eternal. The gospel-wisdom which Solomon would counsel us to pursue may be likened to a treasure hidden in a field, the price of which is all one's goods and possessions. To a man that is unaware of the treasure buried within, it is but a field of weeds, and to pay the radical price required makes no sense at all. Thus are true Christians foolish in the eyes of the religious hypocrites. They will pay a few hours in Church, a few worldly pleasures foregone, a few dollars to charity, in exchange for a little ease of conscience, but they will not give up their whole life for that field. It is unthinkable to them, for they see only the weeds of lightly-appeased guilt and pride over external morality, while the real treasure remains invisible. Far otherwise is it with the man who has seen the hidden treasure and recognizes it for

what it is. He will go in his joy and sell everything that he has to buy that field. And for his sacrifice he will not be sorry, but will consider himself the most blessed man under heaven, and so will he be, for the rags that he sold cannot be compared to the rubies and diamonds and pure gold and silver that he has purchased.

This is because the true treasure is nothing other than the knowledge of God. When hypocrites look for the hidden treasure of religion, they are seeking the prideful trinkets of outward acts of morality, self-motivated service, the harsh treatment of the body, and many other such things they can point to and say, “See, I have accomplished something good and commendable, now my acts of charity must surely outweigh my sins!”. But this treasure is only dross and chaff, and will buy them no eternal pleasure. The true hidden treasure is the fear of the Lord and the understanding of Yahweh. All man’s good consists of fellowship with God: it is the end for which he was created, and the only means by which he might be satisfied. But men are now wretched and miserable because of sin. Their lives are deep pits of hell covered over with the gossamer threads of false hopes and piddling

comforts, which only mask their deep pain and certain calamity for a brief moment. In order to gain the only treasure accommodated to their need, they must leave all that old wretched state, and apply to God with diligence for communion with him. See what a comfortable sacrifice it turns out to be, for the one who gives up his life to find the hidden treasure!

But this treasure is only to be found in the word of God. We must receive his words and commandments, and search them with diligence, if we are to find the richest veins of silver. We must hunger as the birdlings for every good thing which comes from the mouth of their mothers, and clamor after each morsel with all our might, if we would be fed and satisfied. We must crane our necks and open wide our mouths, and stretch out with all our strength – and yet, in all this activity, we must be acknowledging all the time that we are insufficient unless God himself drops in the longed-for bits with his own mouth.

The hidden treasure that we are seeking is only the wisdom of God, which we find through the word of God, and which leads to the knowledge of God; what wonder then if we may simply refer to

this Wisdom of God by his other name, Jesus Christ? In Christ alone is the glory of the Godhead revealed. In him alone is the knowledge of God to be found. In him is the overflowing storehouse of riches and eternal delight, he is the one who reveals to us grace and truth, who brings us to the Father, who satisfies our souls. He is the treasure buried in the gospel-field. This is why he is called the Word of God and the Wisdom of God. And as we seek the hidden riches of true religion, we must be seeking him alone for all our hope, joy, and godliness of life. The common thread that ties together all false religions is that they miss this one point, and place their hope and joy in something other than Christ, or in Christ and something else. But he is too great to share the room in any man's breast. Either he will be the sole tenant, or entirely absent. One must forsake all to follow him, but one will thus find all by forsaking, and gain all by giving up.

This glimpse of the treasure hidden in the gospel-field of God's word ought to motivate us to give up everything, set our faces steadfastly to the hills, and strike off in unflagging pursuit of it. But we must take care that we do so lawfully, lest we be as the Jews whom Paul lamented for their zeal



without knowledge. To that end, we will turn now, in the will of God, to the way in which we must go about our task of seeking.



# The Hidden Treasure

## 2. Setting Out for the Field



WHEN A man desires to build a tower, he must first sit down and calculate what he should require to bring the project through to completion, and determine if he is both able and willing to spend so much. How foolish would they consider that man who, having concluded that he had just enough to build, and no more, laid the foundation and then consumed the rest of his stores on riotous living, and was never able to complete what he had begun! But are not very many professors of religion so foolish even today? They want the consolation of the gospel, and would fain be disciples of Christ, and so they set out to follow him, but scarcely give him one day a week, while spending the rest of their passions on worldly and ephemeral amusements. They have not counted the cost, nor considered that, if one would be accounted Christ's at all, he must belong to him wholly. He must forsake father and mother and goods and kindred, yes, and even his own life, and press hard behind him to the ends of the earth. But those who make a show of seeking him, when they have not counted the cost, will find out in the judgment that they do not have him at all. Oh, how bitter will be those words, "I never knew you; depart from me, you who work iniquity"!

Such a one was the rich young ruler, who sought Jesus out, but upon hearing his hard demands, went away sorrowing. He considered his earthly goods too high a price to pay for the heavenly Treasure, inasmuch as its surpassing worth was still hidden to him. But in our churches today, how many are the same as he?

Before we set out for the treasure fields, then, let us ask ourselves whether we are really willing to give up everything in order to find the buried gold. God will not honor our selfish requests to add the comforts of religion to our storehouse of worldly joys. He will either give us his own storehouse, full and overflowing with riches that cannot rust or fade away, or let us sit on our little dung-heap, which we refuse to leave. But he will not let us profane his treasures with the rubbish that we would bring thither. He will not let us dishonor his Son by accepting him as one gift to add to the many good things we already delight in. When he gave us the Son, he gave us every good thing that heaven has to offer; and if heaven have no more riches than are to be found in him, where will we find them upon the earth?

Let us set out then! The fields are rich, the

treasure is to be had, and the Father is ever willing to strengthen our feeble efforts, and crown them with good success. But if we go, let us be sure that we must leave all of our accumulated treasures, and carrying nothing in our hands, hope that they will be replaced with something better. Let us steel ourselves for the labor, cry out for God's strengthening hand, plug our ears and stop our eyes to the burning Sodom behind us, and run for our lives to the gospel-fields, determined that whether he should take us home tomorrow or leave us here another hundred years, when he comes he will find us digging still.

Now that we have counted the cost, and have cried out in our hearts, "Take the world, but give me Jesus," we are ready to begin our labors. But before we take even the first step, we must be sure that it is in the right direction. Consider how they would mock him who, having heard of the gold rush in California, determined to have his share of the goods, packed his things, and set out eastward! Or suppose he was eager to begin his digging right away, and with pick and shovel in hand, started carving up his own back yard! But how many unsuspecting Christians have done that very thing? They have felt a hunger to know their

Savior, and so have turned to the latest religious fad, or the newest bestseller in the Christian market. But Christ is not to be found in the heaps of gilded trends which delight to make much of man's own goodness, his self esteem, the power of positive thinking, and many other such things which are nowhere to be found in God's Word. Some day, God will judge these false shepherds, who lead the guileless sheep into the cliffs and crags of false gospels – the prosperity gospel, the gospel of self-esteem, and many others beside – and turn them aside from the rich meadows where they might find true sustenance. But until that day, O simple believer, avoid them, flee from them, do not listen for a moment to their lies! Be as the noble Bereans, who tested every word by God's own Word, and cast aside all which rang false. If one is digging in the right field, his labor will be richly rewarded; but if he dig elsewhere, he will find only sorrow and travail for his labors, and will fall to his ruin in the pit which he has dug in the hopes of striking gold.

Let us not head to the wrong field, and neither let us stay at home in our own backyard! Certain persons have thought that they could advance in religion by meditating in their own heart, and



spending their days in quiet solitude, when they knew not where to find the substance of their meditations. Others have thought that they might profitably study the bible in their home groups by reading a passage at random, and going around the circle, declaring "what it means to me". But a hermit or mystic who has spent his life in pensive reflection is no more a saint than the worldly man, unless he has been meditating upon the Truth, which is Jesus. And what the bible means to me is bringing me to the brink of ruin, unless it also be what it means to God. Let us beware, then, of forming our religious principles from our own thoughts or intuitions, for if we do so, we will be as that foolish miner who was caught digging for gold in his backyard, when the fields were in another country.

We will set off then for the right field, which is the word of God as he intended for it to be understood; but as we head out, we must be certain that we are carrying the right tools. A miner who scratches in the earth with his fingernails will soon fall behind him who has a pick! What are the tools that we must bring? Mark carefully, for they are not such tools as one might counsel you to carry, but they are nonetheless

essential for the task. The first tools that any believer must bring with him to the field of God's word are only faith and humility. Without these, we will never advance the space of a footstep into God's promised land. When we approach the word humbly, we are confessing that we have a desperate need, that we cannot find the wherewithal to fulfill it, that our own thoughts and strategies and efforts are bankrupt and futile. When we approach the word in faith, we are confessing that the solution to that need is to be found therein; and moreover, that God will be pleased to reward us with the knowledge of it as we cry out to him. Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but those who are sick. So the humble alone need a Savior, and the penniless alone need a great Treasure. Those who distrust the physician's skill will look to themselves for their own remedy, but they who believe he has the medicines and knowledge to effect a cure will spend all their livelihood on hiring him. Likewise, they who are in desperate straits, having squandered all their substance, when they believe their father will be compassionate to them, and redeem them from their troubles, will run back to him, prodigal though they be. Let us likewise turn to the Father in humility and faith, confessing that

we are penniless, and holding fast our confidence that he has great riches, and will give them to us lavishly. For the Father is always pleased to give the treasure of his Son to those who seek him thus.

There are many other valuable tools which one might bring with him to dig into the riches of God's Word, but these are essential. How many scholars have been skilled in Greek, Hebrew, exegesis, etc., and have not had humility and faith? For all their labors, they will see no profit, but heap up wrath for the day of judgment. But the simplest believer, who has not access to these other tools, may nevertheless treasure up great riches, and acquire an abundant knowledge of their Savior, with them alone. Let us not despise the tools of education and learning. If we have given our lives to pursue the Savior, then as God gives us opportunity, we can – no, we must – make profitable use of them. But let us always remember that, without humility and faith, the sharpest intellects in the world will only hasten to their own ruin.

We have gathered our tools and set out to the fields; let us not be negligent to learn from the

experience of others, once we get there. The miner but freshly arrived to the hills would do well to learn from the grizzled veteran, who knows which outcroppings and geological formations hint at the presence of gold underneath, and who has tested the best methods of digging and searching. We too, when we arrive at the storehouses of God's Word, will find that we have been preceded by many who have labored long and hard, and uncovered many rich things. How foolish we should be, if we did not learn from them! Let us be careful to examine the insights of the church fathers, the reformers, the puritans, the aged and godly men in our own congregations; but let us always be testing and comparing their words to the pages of the scriptures. Even the godliest of men have sometimes a wrong thought, and have sometimes mistaken a worthless rock for a precious gem. Let us value their insights, but not hold them infallible at all.

Finally, let us be instructed by the Holy Spirit. If a treasure-seeker were looking for a buried pirate's chest, he might search long and wide and never find it. But if he came across a map, scratched out by the pirate who hid the gold, he could be sure of good success. The one who hid the gold is the best

guide for him who would find it. But who has hidden the gold in the scriptures? Is it not the Holy Spirit, he who carried along the holy men of old, and who spoke by the mouth of David and all the prophets? Is he not the One who reveals Christ to men, and who brings to their remembrance all that he had taught them? And, moreover, is not the Father good to give the Spirit to them who ask diligently, and is not the Spirit gracious to give an anointing to all who are his, so that they might know the truth indeed? Every day, then, as we approach the Word of God, let us cry out the Father, to send his Spirit, that he might open our eyes to the Son. Then, we will find the buried treasure, and cry out for joy.



# The Hidden Treasure

## 3. Finding the Gold

### a. Wherein it Consists





WHEN NEWS of the gold rush of 1849 began to spread from California, passing eastward on the lips of men who had made their fortune and could not contain their joy nor hold back the good news, many countless prospectors were encouraged by tales of great riches to be had for the taking, to leave behind their homes, and set off to California, where they hoped they would strike it rich. But as is often the case, far more of these prospectors ended up rather squandering all their goods than finding their fortune, for the riches were not so great as to satisfy the lusts of every miner, and those few fortunate enough to have discovered the rich veins hoarded up vast treasures, while the rest starved on a pile of worthless sand. This can never be the case among those who are seeking the riches of wisdom from God's Word; for as much as is uncovered, there is always more yet, and however many miners make their fortune by their toils, they leave the fields not a whit less rich for those coming behind them. However, notwithstanding the inexhaustible richness of the gospel-field, many prospectors of wisdom have undertaken to dig there, and have returned without a trace of the precious metal. How can this be?

This sad scenario often takes place simply because the miner does not know what the gold is, nor how he might recognize it when he sees it. He is as a simple child, whose mind has been filled with vague and wondrous stories of hidden gold, and forthwith sets out to find it, but knows not at all what gold is, and it never occurs to him to ask. Such a miner might cast aside a hundred rich nuggets, not realizing their value, because he had thought they would be clear and sparkling like a diamond, or smooth and white like a pearl. He knows not what to look for, so of course he will not find it.

So foolish a miner may finally return discouraged and embittered by his failure, supposing that religion is a delusion or a crutch to bolster up the wills of weak-minded men, and turning his back on all that he had been told, begin to live according to his own whims, seeking such little, worthless pleasures as may mask his deep discontentment and anger at the God who made him. Thus he who is blind will make himself blinder yet by all his exertions, and even that which he has will be taken away.

Or else, a miner may be fooled into thinking that

he has found the riches for which he was seeking, when all he has in truth are worthless rocks. So many prospectors were tricked into thinking they had struck gold by the glittery appeal of iron pyrite, a thoroughly worthless substance, that it acquired the nickname “fool’s gold”. In the same way, many religious professors have found much fool’s gold in their reading of the bible, and consider themselves to be rich in spiritual treasures, when they are really poor and wretched.

Such a man was the Apostle Paul, before the Lord found him out. He was as zealous a seeker of the wisdom of God’s Word as could be found, and gathered up many false riches of head-knowledge and moralism and self-motivated religion, so that all around him professed him to be a mighty man of God, rich in the truth he had vouchsafed to mankind. But all those things that he had once considered gain, he learned to count as loss when this one thing occurred, that he saw the true gold, and recognized it for what it is. Then, he saw that his pile of glittering baubles was really a dung heap, and rejoiced to cast aside the whole worthless mound. So must it ever be: until we see the true gold, we will think that all other manner of worthless substances are precious beyond

compare, when they are really rubbish.

So what is this true gold? It is none other than Jesus Christ. Jesus is he whom Paul saw on the road to Damascus, and it was he who made him understand the worthlessness of all he had valued before. How rich and sparkly the treasures of the moralists appear, before one has looked upon Christ! How righteous and worthy do they seem, who live their lives flawlessly, never transgressing one of those rules that they have imposed upon themselves for the implementation of holiness in their lives, and who hope by their mighty efforts to find a place in the Kingdom of God. Such men have sat upon poles for many years, or worn only harsh and cruel garments of hair, or gone for many days without food and drink, and have won the admiration of many. Others have faithfully attended church every Sunday, and avoided wine and tobacco, substances in which those Gentile sinners delight, and never let a curse-word slip out of their mouths, but within their hearts are full of pride and hatred. These have treasured up much fool's gold, but have not a penny to their name.

Let us not be so easily fooled, dear Christian! The false treasures of the externalists only appear to be

rich and beautiful when Christ has not been seen. In the light of the sun, the brilliance of the stars is swallowed up; in the art gallery of the masters, the stick-figure scribblings of a child seem poor and contemptible; and before the righteousness of Christ, the fool's-gold morality of the self-righteous is seen at once to be a stinking pile of dung. A miner must find that which is gold indeed, which God has made and hidden in the earth, or he will get it nowhere, no matter how he paints over his worthless rocks. And a Christian must find the righteousness of Christ, which comes from God, if he would be rich. No matter how he may gild over the sandstone of his heart with mighty deeds and prayers, it will be as worthless as before unless God exchanges it for the righteousness of Christ.

Why then do so many Christians search the gospel-fields of God's Word for the fool's gold of morality, self-esteem, and other such things, and refuse to gather from them the true gold of knowing Jesus? They read the Old Testament stories like Aesop's fables, and derive from them many useless morals, which serve only to build up their dung heaps of self-righteousness. They misuse the Law and the Gospel, thinking by the

one to earn a righteousness as it were by works, and by the other to cover over their selfish lusts as with a cloak of maliciousness. This they do simply because they have not seen Jesus, and do not know how all the parts of scripture relate to him, and so they are easily fooled by shiny trinkets. Let us learn from their tragic example, and be quick to trace every verse to the cross of Jesus Christ, where its significance will become utterly apparent, lest we too end up as they.

That Jesus alone is the true gold hidden within the fields of God's Word may be demonstrated in several ways. First, in that man's true riches consist of the knowledge of God, and the scriptures were written by the condescension of God, to be a self-revelation to mankind, so that they might find their blessedness in him alone. God did not speak to mankind so that they might know how to live their lives well without him. He did not give his word as an instruction manual for self-made men. He spoke to call out of the kingdom of darkness a people to be his own people, to whom he would be God forever. This is why he first called Abraham, and held himself out to the patriarch as his only treasure and exceeding great reward. This is why he redeemed his people

from Egypt, so that they would be a kingdom of priests to him, dwelling in the land where he had chosen for his name to dwell. This is why he gave such meticulous instructions for the construction of the tabernacle and later the temple, both of which signified and held forth to the people his very presence. This is why he instituted the sacrificial and festal systems, which taught the people in a figure the way to come back into his presence. In all the word of God, we see God acting to call out a people for his own name, that they should be his, and know him, and have fellowship with him forevermore. The treasure he gave to all his people is nothing but himself. God is his people's exceeding great reward.

But consider further: how can God be known or seen? Is it not only through Jesus Christ? No man has seen God at any time, but the only-begotten Son of God has made him known. The word of God is the self-revelation of God; and Jesus, who is the eternal Word, is the final and perfect self-revelation of God. This self-revelation is the sole substance of the gospel treasure; and therefore Jesus, whom to see is to see the Father, is the sole substance of the riches and the only gold that we may find, as we dig in the treasure fields.

Jesus is our treasure because he reveals to us God; he is likewise our treasure because he reveals to us perfect manhood, and shows us what we ought to be. We were created in the image of God, and with the purpose of extending his kingship and righteousness throughout the world, always in joyful fellowship with and subordination to him. Until we can accomplish that purpose, our lives will be incomplete. But we have fallen, God's image within us has been marred, and we are thoroughly unable to accomplish our created purpose, or know the satisfaction which inheres in the perfect state of blessing into which Adam was first created. But Jesus took upon himself human flesh, became one of us, and accomplished that which Adam had failed to do. He showed forth the image of God in man to perfection, he obeyed God's law, and he will one day rule over every creature in the earth, with all his enemies under his footstool, as the perfect man. And by this accomplishment, he holds forth to us the gospel gold in two ways:

First, he demonstrates what we ought to be, both by his teaching and by his example, which he showed forth when he was upon earth. Oh, how



wisely did our Savior expound the law of Moses and the eternal law of God, during his Sermon on the Mount! The law of Moses was flawless, having come from the very finger of God; and yet it was inadequate until Jesus, our second Law-giver came. Moses was able to write on stone, but Jesus writes on tablets of flesh. Moses gives the external requirements of morality, but Jesus gives the essential truth behind the command. Moses looks ahead to Christ in a thousand different ways, but Jesus is Christ indeed, and fulfills all the hints and shadows of the law. How great is the wisdom of our Savior!

But not only does Jesus show us perfect manhood, he also forms perfect manhood within us, first by the mystical union of ourselves with him, so that we become his body and he our head; and second, by sending his Spirit to create anew within us the image of God that we had marred; which he does by showing us himself, and causing us to reflect that very image. In Christ, we are brought to God, who is our treasure; and we are brought to perfect manhood in the image of God, which is our highest calling and most blessed state of happiness.

Finally, Jesus is the true gospel-gold of God's fields, because he is the one who reveals grace and truth. So much fuller is the grace and truth that Christ brought to mankind in his advent, that it could be sharply contrasted with Moses' contribution, who wrote down the very words of God! In Jesus' truth, we see who God really is, and meet in that knowledge our rich and fulfilling destiny. In Jesus' grace, we are brought to that God whom we have been shown, and made to triumph over every obstacle of sin that had previously prevented us. Jesus has become one of us to show us the Father, to forgive our sins and bring us to him, to rule over all the earth, and bring us up to rule with him, to fulfill and accomplish all that the law and prophets had spoken. In all these ways, he is the gold which Solomon would counsel us to seek. He is the true Wisdom of God. Let us cast aside the dung heap of false riches, and seek him alone, as we dig in the fields of the scriptures.

# The Hidden Treasure

## 3. Finding the Gold

### b. In What Manner it is to be Sought



IT IS A necessary quality for our pursuit of spiritual riches, if we would be successful, that we understand what the treasure consists of, so that we might recognize it when we see it; and as we have observed, man's true spiritual good is to be found only in the knowledge of Christ. He is the gospel-gold, the pearl of great price, the treasure hidden in the field. But merely understanding this will not be sufficient to fill our coffers, for we must likewise be instructed in the manner of searching, when we have once arrived in the fields of God's Word. Suppose a prospector came to California, ready to distinguish between true gold and fool's gold, and thinking that he should soon make himself rich, he forthwith began to scrutinize the tree-tops, to see whether he would find the gold in the highest boughs. For all his knowledge, he would not soon be successful. So too, the Christian who has been taught to seek Christ in all the scriptures, but does not know how, may wander over many a page without uncovering the deepest veins of silver; or may even fabricate treasures of dubious value, supported only by tenuous reasonings, far-fetched allegories, or the impulses of his own heart.

How then does one find Christ in the long and

detailed histories of Israel, the tedious genealogies, the intricate systems of ceremonial cleanness, and many other fields that seem at first glance to be barren of the true treasure of the Messiah? How does one certify Christ's assertion to the Pharisees, that all the scriptures testify of himself? How may one learn what Jesus uncovered to his disciples when, beginning from Moses and all the prophets, he revealed to them the things concerning himself?

From the outset, one must be certain that it is the Spirit's delight to reveal Jesus to him who humbly and prayerfully seeks him, and that he testifies of Christ through the pages of the scripture; so that, however many tools and strategies one may have in his mind, if he be not filled with the Spirit, he will make no progress. And furthermore, it must be kept in mind that the Spirit has already made clear many mysteries of the Old Testament, through the apostles and prophets by whom he penned the New Testament. Many were the spiritual riches that God had hidden away under lock and key in the Hebrew scriptures; but now that he has sent forth his Son, we are provided with the key that will unlock every treasure chest: and the key is the person and work of Christ.

Consider what thorough use the New Testament writers made of the Hebrew scriptures: how many prophecies they interpreted, how many shadows they brought to light, how many types they saw realized. A precise knowledge of the usages of the Old Testament in the New will give us much help as we labor to uncover the richest veins; for first of all, they expose the true gold of many a precious vein already, and second, they exemplify the way in which this is to be done, so that many other rich veins, which have not been touched upon, might be followed in the same manner. The first revelation of the Son of God has given us the gospel-key by which we might unlock the hidden treasures of the scriptures, and the Holy Spirit has unlocked many of those treasures for us already, in the epistles; and he has left us the key, so that we might unlock every coffer which yet remains. In this way, the writer of Hebrews unlocks the typological mysteries of the Melchizedekian priesthood, the Day of Atonement, and many other things, but concerning the significance of all the tabernacle furniture, he simply says that he has not the time to touch upon it all in detail. From this circumstance, we understand that there is much value to be had in its details, if we but put it

to the same Christ-centered use that he has been putting other such things.

The evidence of the New Testament authors' treatment of the Old Testament can scarcely be emphasized too much; for there is a method of interpreting the bible today that makes much of what is called the "literal," or "normal" sense, but is actually nothing but the naturalistic, or human sense. By means of this canon of interpretation, the prophecies of the Old Testament are made to contradict the interpretations of the New Testament, as if the same God had not inspired both, or as if he were the author of confusion and contradiction. Let us be aware of these false ideas, and avoid them! For they deny that we might be brought into God's Israel as the spiritual seed of Abraham by faith, and relegate the entire Old Testament corpus of promises to the ethnic Jews alone, but first strip the promises of their greater meaning, so that they have to do primarily with the possession of a strip of land in Palestine. They have forgotten that Abraham himself saw through the type of Canaan and was searching for a better city, or that he saw Christ's day and rejoiced. They have forgotten that all the promises made to Abraham were made to him and his Seed, which is



Christ, and that all the promises have been fulfilled in him, that they have received their “amen” in him, and that they belong to those who are co-heirs with him, and who have been made Abraham’s seed by their inclusion in his body. Ah, what treasures they have deprived themselves of, because they did not take into account this simple truth, that the Holy Spirit taught us how to understand the Old Testament scriptures through the New Testament interpretations of the apostles.

So then, keeping these preliminary considerations ever before us, let us observe a few points by which the Christ-centeredness of all the scriptures might be made more manifest, so that we might labor profitably in even the most obscure of fields.

First, we must always remember the unity of the biblical story. Oh, how many truths have been lost by the carving up of the bible into self-standing units, when it is at once manifest that it was written as one epic story! The bible is not a loosely-related collection of sacred histories and moral teachings, as some would have it to be; it is the divine and authoritative account of all of history, containing the very purpose for the

creation of the world and all its subsequent affairs, and casting all into one vast, unified, and mutually-interpretive epic tale of one great promised Hero, and the work that he should do. All history is minutely designed for the self-glorification of God through the revelation of his Christ, and the bible is just the book that gives this story of world history from God's perspective. It is a staggeringly powerful and beautiful story of a great and sovereign Creator, who made the most blessed of creatures in his own image; of the devastating fall that this creature suffered by his rebellion, plunging all his race, yes, and the whole of creation, into a curse of immense proportions; and of a promised Messiah, who from before time began had determined to accomplish the unthinkable task of redeeming and recreating so wretched a race and universe. It is a simple enough story line, but so manifold and splendid that its depths may not be exhausted by an eternity of searching; and when once this basic story has been forgotten, in the reading of any passage of scriptures, all will crumble into a pile of confused teachings, unsupported by the massive foundation of the gospel, from which one may only derive a few twisted moralistic maxims, simply because he has lost sight of the whole. The reading of the

scriptures that does not take into account its unified story-line may be compared to the study of a mosaic that never considers the relationship of the individual tesserae to each other. One may learn much of the precise shape and color of each irregular piece, but until he steps back to observe how they all fit together to produce one beautiful picture, he is none the better for it.

So let us always keep the flow of redemptive history in mind, as we study any portion of the scriptures, for only then will we see how Christ-centered and cross-centered they really are. The incarnation, ministry, sin-bearing and suffering work of Christ, and the victory that he should accomplish afterward, is everywhere prepared for and typified in the Old Testament, and everywhere expounded and applied in the New Testament. It is the very center and essence of the bible, the sun around which all else revolves, and without which all must fall into confusion, the heart of the story pumping life into all the body, apart from which everything is dead and meaningless. Until the relationship of any portion of scripture has been related to Calvary, the greatest work of the great God-Man, then its significance has not been adequately understood, and its precious gold has

not been uncovered.

Then, in addition to remembering the unified story of the bible, one may dig up many precious nuggets in various other ways, and so find himself rich in the truth of Jesus. One of these ways is to note the several theophanies by which God revealed himself to his people. As no one has seen God, who is a spirit, at any time, it is certain that many of these self-revelations are nothing but the pre-incarnate appearances of Christ to his people. Remember especially the Angel of the Lord, who speaks as God, and accepts worship from God's people, and yet in the visions of Zechariah speaks together with God as a distinct person; is this not the Christ? Remember also the appearance of the Lord of Hosts to Isaiah, the brilliant glory of whom caused him to melt in despair, but the sovereign mercy of whom purified him from his sins. As the Evangelist John later declared, Isaiah then saw the glory of Christ, and spoke of him. Let us observe, then, that even before he finally took on flesh, the Son of God was already giving glimpses and foretastes of the ministry that he would one day accomplish, of revealing the glory of the Godhead to mankind, interceding and mediating for them, and enabling them to see God

and live.

Furthermore, one may spend much profitable time in uncovering the precious gems of the Messianic prophecies, which are scattered here and there throughout all the Old Testament, as brilliant stars in the nighttime skies. Remember from the earliest stages the promises of a conquering Seed born of woman, of one from the tribe of Judah who would wield the scepter forevermore, of the morning Star that would one day arise, of the prophet like Moses, of the Redeemer who would rise again and plead Job's case. Notice how, as the scriptures unfold, God's plan becomes ever more clear and explicit, as a light shining always more brightly in a gloomy land, and the Messiah that he had promised takes on a more manifold and glorious character, as the root of Jesse reigning on the throne of David, the Almighty God whose kingdom would never end, Immanuel, our God with us, the suffering Servant who would bear men's sins, the glorious Warrior, robes stained red with the blood of his enemies, who would once again deliver his people with a mighty hand. Here, there is much fine gold to be had for the digging!

But Jesus is not only promised and anticipated in explicit prophecies: he is also typified in many marvelous and shadowy ways, throughout the pages of the bible. Who he should be and what he should accomplish are everywhere whispered in the lives and circumstances of God's people: he is the burning bush, who burns as if with the fire of God's wrath, and yet is not consumed; he is Joseph, betrayed by his brothers, sold for a paltry sum of silver, cast into the pit for no wrong of his own, and raised up by God to the right hand of the king, from where he gives many rich gifts to his brothers. He is the Passover Lamb, the ram taken in Isaac's place, the scapegoat for the Day of Atonement, the Temple, the Rock that followed Israel in the wilderness, the Manna that came down from heaven to nourish them for their journey home. In these and a thousand other ways, we may see Jesus the Savior foreshadowed in God's epic tale of redemptive history; and not just in these particular ways, but in the history of God's people as a whole, who at their birth as a nation were made to undergo the mad wrath of a king who spilled the blood of all the male children; who were then called from Egypt, underwent baptism in the Red Sea, were tempted for forty years in the wilderness, were eventually cast off

and exiled for sins, but were then restored – even as Jesus was born to the same mad raging of the king, was called out from Egypt, was baptized and tempted for forty days in the wilderness, underwent exile from God for our sins, and was gloriously restored the third day, when he rose from the dead. Jesus is God’s true Israel, who succeeded where the Jewish nation had failed, and in whom all the families of the earth have become blessed indeed. And such are the riches of the gospel-gold hidden in the Old Testament, that we have just stumbled along picking up the nuggets lying on the surface, and have already become rich indeed. Ah, what wonders shall we find beneath the surface, as we dig with all our strength? Things too rich to imagine, I suspect, with which we shall not fail to be delighted for all eternity.





# The Hidden Treasure

## 3. Finding the Gold

### c. A Survey of the Fields in Which it is to be Sought



IN THE ART of prospecting for gold, it must ever be kept in mind that, according to the various natures of the fields in which one is searching, the nature of the processes employed must be adapted. When gold is sought from the flowing streams, a steady hand and discerning eye must be taken advantage of, and through the patient perseverance of the seeker, many precious nuggets might be panned out from the midst of the worthless bits of sand and rock. But the deep mines want a strong arm and energetic pick, which might extend the tunnels many miles into the bosom of the earth, and find out the deepest veins hidden far away from the surface. So is it with the labor of seeking the gospel-gold from the fields of God's word: that pursuit which might be successful in the histories will little profit in the psalms. The method most likely to obtain good results in the prophets will advance but little in the proverbs. A thorough knowledge of the diverse fields in which one is working, and the strategies best adapted for those fields, must always be remembered.

And such is the manifold wonder of the divine wisdom of revelation, that the fields which stretch out before us are richly and marvelously diverse

indeed! Consider the different and complementary natures of some of the following scripture-fields:

In Genesis, we find the necessary background and context given for all that is to follow, and the structured ordering of the stage upon which world history is to be played out. The gold in this field lies like great nuggets upon the surface, which can be marked out better from on high, as if one were to survey the whole with the eye of an eagle, than from the narrow confines of a few verses or chapters. Here, we see the creation of man by the mighty Word of God, his fall, brought about by the deception of the Serpent, who would become his arch-enemy for all the drama, and the first promise of the mighty, conquering Hero, the woman's Seed. We see the results of man's first rebellion, how it plunges the entire race into such a state of miserable depravity that his condition is well-nigh hopeless, and the mighty wrath of God that it finally calls down after his patience has been exhausted, destroying the entire world. We see the sovereign grace of God in calling out one man and his family, preserving them from his wrath by hiding them in the bosom of the ark (that notable type of Christ), which passes through the waters

of God's judgment unscathed. We see that, for all man's wickedness, God's purpose for him to rule the earth has not been abandoned, and so his original mandate is given to Noah again, in the new earth that he inherits. We see how men's intention of accomplishing that goal through their own labors is frustrated, and results in their being scattered abroad and confused in their speech; but how God has determined to accomplish the reverse through his own plan, calling out a man through whose Seed all the nations of earth would be gathered together again. We see the promise given to him of a return to Paradise, how he wanders about in the promised land of God's presence as a sojourner for many years, how God brings about the promised heir through the miracle of his life-giving power, how through him he builds a nation in the midst of the cruel world power of Egypt. In short, we see a stage set which accounts minutely for every nation on earth, and marks out the boundaries of their habitation; and reveals how, from all those nations, a people would be gathered together in one promised Seed, and make their pilgrimage back to the paradise that their forefather had lost; while the rest of the world would remain scattered and driven out from this paradise, and would vent their

rage and frustration on God's people, but to no avail.

In the rest of the Pentateuch, we must begin to carve out deep mines, and follow the gold through the veins of the intricate types and shadows which constitute the chief mode of instruction for that era. In the histories, we see many notable examples of how the promised Seed should accomplish deliverance for his people, bringing them through the Red Sea of God's judgment unscathed, while thereby destroying all their enemies; preserving them through the wilderness where they must wander before they reach home, with the water that flows freely from the Rock, and the bread that comes down from heaven; and guiding them with his presence, as the pillar of cloud and fire. We see in the types of the sacrificial system many wonderful things about our Savior, who should bear our sins, undergo our punishment, provide for our forgiveness, bring us back into God's presence, spread out before us a joyful feast in fellowship with God, sustained by his own sacrificial body, and draw out from our willing hands the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. We see in the laws of clean and unclean, and the arrangement of the tabernacle,

the utter holiness of God, and the holiness that we should have to partake of, by a separation from all that is sinful and impure, before we can be found in his presence. We see in the price of redemption a type of Jesus' purchasing us with the price of his own blood, and many other things besides, which time forbids us now to elaborate upon.

In Joshua, we note how God does in fact bring his people back into the promised land of his presence, driving out and vanquishing all their enemies, through the victorious presence of the Captain of the Lord's hosts, the Angel of the Lord, who is Christ. In the book of the Judges, we stumble into a dry and dusty land, where the gold is all but lost in the midst of the sands of depravity and defeat, but which is therefore all the more beautiful when panned out with a patient hand. Even as a backdrop of black velvet sets off the resplendent luster of a beautiful diamond, so the failure of God's people shows forth in greater splendor the freeness of his grace, and the typical judges shine with a more beautiful and encouraging light.

In Ruth, we are reminded of the ultimate plan of God to bring together all peoples into the nation

that would arise from Abraham's seed, and we see a most precious and intimate glimpse of our Husband and Kinsman-Redeemer; and there, another link in the golden chain which should issue forth in the Messiah is forged.

In the following stories of the kings of Israel, we see the typical history of God's people climax in the brilliant reigns of kings David and Solomon, the two most notable types of the Savior in all the Old Testament; and then, just as the moon, when it has become full, immediately begins slowly to wane, so we see this mighty kingdom falter by degrees, and end in the utmost calamity; and thus, the first tragic act, which both prepares the way for God's coming Messiah, and whispers his story ahead of time, comes to its conclusion.

But out of the ashes of utter defeat arises the dawn of a new and golden era, which only begins by slow degrees, but promises ultimate victory. And a new tabernacle, although humbler than the first, hints at the greater glory it should finally bear, for it will see God's true presence, not just typified in the shekinah glory, but in all its fullness bodily, when the Messiah finally arises to walk in its courts. Such is the forward-looking and hopeful



story of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

As we approach the great poetic portions of the bible, we are coming into a very different kind of field indeed. These nuggets are so rich and manifold that they must be held in many different lights to be appreciated, and their marvelous facets sparkle with a thousand different comforts. There, we hear the psalmists singing to God the Father *through* the Messiah, or else singing *to* the Messiah, or crying out for deliverance on the basis of their *union with* the Messiah; or sometimes we hear the Messiah singing *through them*, and pouring out his own soul to God, for the calamities that should come upon him, undeserved though they be, on the occasion of similar and typical circumstances which happened in the lives of the psalmists. Ah, here the spirit of prophecy paints a portrait of Jesus which can be seen only by his beloved bride, and which has not failed to thrill her soul throughout the ages.

Likewise in Job we see many precious glimpses of the coming Redeemer who should rise from the dead; and also, of the role that the Enemy should play in the drama, always raging against God and his people, but so chained by God that in his very

ragings, he accomplishes God's own good purposes in calling out and purifying a people. Here also we meet with that precious truth that, the one who suffers at the hands of the devil, yes, and at God's hand himself, is not necessarily therefore evil; and in this one point, we have the truth of the gospel, that Jesus, being righteous, should suffer for no wrong of his own (and also that those who are his might follow in the same footsteps), most positively established.

In Proverbs, we see Christ as the manifold Wisdom of God, who holds forth every good thing to the one who seeks him, in the gospel; but his rival, the whore of this world, offers the many lesser and deceptive pleasures of fornication, laziness, gluttony, etc., to turn aside the hearts of the simple. We see, moreover, how we ought to frame our lives in every detail, so as to be like him whom we love, the all-good Christ. Then, in Ecclesiastes, we see the futility of all things cursed and earthly, and are counseled to look ahead to a different time, when God will bring all things into judgment, and destroying the works of vanity, give joy only to the righteous in Christ. In the Song of Solomon, we encounter, through the type of Solomon's great love for his Shulamite bride, the

eternal love between Christ and the Church.

In the prophets, we are reminded again of the unity of revelation, as they take up only the themes that already inhered in the Mosaic Law, and apply them to the situations of their day, emphasizing God's eternal covenant with his people, and calling down the judgment and exile which God's injured law demanded. But just as the fierceness of the law becomes more pronounced in their day, so the free gospel-gold of the work of the Christ shines the more clearly, as the gracious restoration is many times announced, the universal expansion of the Kingdom is much anticipated, and the circumstances surrounding the coming of the promised Seed are revealed in ever clearer terms.

Then, in the gospels, we have the very heart of divine revelation, which beats life into the rest, so that, if all that came before were fields rich in gold, this is pure and polished gold itself, and the mother lode to which every other vein must be traced. Here, all the types find their fulfillment, and all the histories are recapitulated in the life of One who trades victory and perfection for all the flaws and failures that had come before; here we

see every promise fulfilled, every purpose accomplished, and every victory won. Here is the central moment of all history, the very reason for the creation of mankind, and the reward that will satisfy us with its inexhaustible depths for unnumbered ages.

In Acts, we have the history of God's newly restored and recreated people, now brought together from every nation in Christ, the Seed of Abraham, and we see how she begins to spread across the earth, this time with the certain hope of victory. The epistles not only contain much fine gold themselves, but they take up and brush off the gold that had been hidden in the fields before, and arrange it before our eyes in an orderly fashion, so that, if one would become rich in the Old Testament treasure, he ought first to begin in the New Testament treasuries, and take his example from there.

And finally, in Revelation, the last chapter of God's great saga concludes: the Lamb who once came meek and mild, to bear the sins of his people, will return in raging fury to destroy all his enemies. The fruits of his great accomplishment will be gleaned from all the fields of the world, and

then the end will come. Here, the paradise that was lost will be regained, all that was cursed will be done away, and the mighty God-Man, for whose sake all history was designed, will enjoy the rewards of the great victory of the ages, a universal people to sing his praise and dwell before him in love and unity forevermore.

Thus we have but hinted at the manifold means by which God has hidden the rich and satisfying gold of the knowledge of his Christ in the pages of revelation: let us up and be digging, for there is much more to be had, such as will satisfy our souls as with a sumptuous feast, and intoxicate our hearts with pleasure, as with the finest of well-aged wines! If we would be rich, all the gold we can carry away is ours to be had for the taking, if we will only arise to gather it up.



# The Hidden Treasure

## 4. Refining the Gold





AS DIFFICULT and arduous as are the labors of bringing out the precious minerals from their hiding places in the depths of the earth, any miner will affirm that, once they have been so gathered up, his labor is not at all done. For the gold and silver to gleam with all their beauty and be valued at their full worth, they must first be purified and refined; which is just to say that, any substance which is not true to their nature, must by various means be teased out and discarded. This process of refinement is unexceptionally necessary in the pursuit of earth's buried treasures, for the desired minerals are never found thoroughly pure, but always mingled with some degree of unwanted substances, the worthless dross, to be rid of which is the design of the refinement. A miner who takes a sack of gold ore into a store might gain some use from his riches, but not nearly so much as he who takes a refined and certified ingot.

In our labors for the gospel gold, as well, we must take especial pains to refine what we have digged up, or else we will not get the usefulness and beauty out of it that we might otherwise have had. For the truth is the same with us as it is with the miner, that when we first discover the vein, the minerals we bring out will not be altogether pure.

The reason for this impurity is different in the one case than in the other, however. The impurity of the miner's gold consists in itself, and in its natural state as it lies buried in the dirty earth. The impurity of the gold of the gospel, which we extract from God's Word, consists always in ourselves, and the impurities we bring with us to the veins we are discovering. The gold in the fields of divine revelation is without exception one-hundred percent pure: but we are so stained with filth, that when once we have touched it, we defile it, and must get rid of the imperfections that we have brought in ourselves to the mines. So then, the process of refining the gospel gold is really a process of refining ourselves: as we treasure up the gold in our hearts, and store up the knowledge of the Savior, we must be casting out the dirt which had previously been laid up there, so that we might have a most refined and precious substance in our storehouses, untainted by all which is opposed to its nature, which had at first inhered in the storage place. This is a lifelong task, but the goal is well worth every effort spent in its pursuit.

It is manifest at once that this should be so: for the gold we have been seeking is only the knowledge

of the Savior, and through him, the knowledge of all the Triune Godhead; but both the source of man's fall and the terrible results to which that fall gave rise involve, most importantly, a mistaken knowledge of God. When Eve first began to doubt the true knowledge of God that she possessed, and allowed the Serpent to trade a little pure gold for the dross of his lying caricature of God, she fell, and the result of that fall was that she lost all her intimate knowledge of and fellowship with God. When she traded off just a little gold, she had all her gold taken from her, and all that was left over in her heart was the dross of a god fashioned in her own image. The preciousness of God's promise of grace was that, in his great goodness and bounty, he undertook to restore her lost riches to her, and bring her back into fellowship with himself. But the way in which he did so, and the way in which he ever works among the fallen men of his favor, was by slow degrees, and through a gradual process of burning away the heart's impurities and purifying the precious gold of the knowledge of himself, which is an operation the Spirit most readily performs through the sole means of the seven-times purified word of God.

But see how many impurities there have remained

within Christendom, in the true gospel gold of knowing God? Everywhere abounds the dross of Arminianism, man-centered theology, and all the filth that Satan has ever devised and mankind has ever swallowed, which makes the treasures of even sincere and genuine Christians manifestly less beautiful and valuable than they ought to be. Let us be certain that, as Satan is ever in the process of shoveling the dirt in, we must ever be in the process of getting rid of it, and purifying such gold as God has entrusted to us, lest we find in the end that we have no gold at all. For this has been the outcome of many: a little Arminianism has led to a thoroughgoing Pelagianism, or more recently, to Open Theism, in the treasure chests of which false religions there remains nothing at all of the gold of knowing Christ, so thoroughly has all that been cast out to make room for the ear-tickling lies of dross and man-made theology. Ah believer, will you be like so many, and opening up your treasure chest on the Day of Judgment, find that you have no gold at all but a pile of filthy rags, and hear those terrible words of the Savior you professed to know, “Depart from me: I never knew you”? Then let us be certain that we remain ever in the process of refinement; into which, we will now inquire in some more detail.

The chief and most effective means of refining gold and silver is fire. When dross is exposed to the fire, it immediately burns up; but the gold will remain unharmed. This must be the way that we purify our buried gold: we must bring it all before the fire of God's Word, and let that which cannot stand before this fire be consumed. How simple this process is, and yet it is a process that no person will naturally be willing to perform, for the flames will scorch his own self-vanity. When we bring the impure gold of the Arminian gospel to the fire of God's Word, all that it says about God's power and grace remains untouched; but those ways in which it limits God's power and grace, saying that his power is bounded by man's free will, and his grace is limited to a mere offer, and is not the almighty and irresistible stirring to life that the bible shows it to be, must be burned up at once by the fires of a thousand verses. Thus our gold, which boasts in the infinite greatness of God, is made more pure and beautiful, but the dross that we had loved, because it made much of ourselves and our ability to shape our own destiny and determine our own being, is painfully burned away. This is ever the process of refinement that we must be pursuing. But just as the application of

an antiseptic ointment at first stings and then heals, so it is in this case: at first, we are pricked and stung to cast away those things we pridefully delighted in, but then, when we see that the removal of those false ideas of sin, self, and the Savior only made room for a better treasure of knowing God more intimately, we are glad for the little bit of pain which healed so much corruption and sorrow-working gangrene. We think that we can only be happy if others worship and adore us, or at least if we can worship ourselves; but we soon grow weary of exulting in our little natures, and that which promised eternal joy casts us into ceaseless gloom and misery. The truth is, we can only be happy if we are freed to worship something infinitely and eternally glorious. And we can only be so freed if we die to ourselves, and live to Christ, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

How then are we to bring the flames of God's Word into the kiln where we have stored up our gathered treasure? It is only by the twin-handled bellows of an historical-grammatical exegesis that we may do so. Although fire may only flame up where there is wind, and so the fire of God's Word may only be kindled where there is his Spirit; yet

there are means to be made use of, and those means require much tiresome labor, just as the energetic operation of a bellows is not for the feeble or irresolute. It makes a mockery of God's chosen means to pray for the Holy Spirit to enlighten us, and then spend our time slothfully, reading through a chapter a day in haste, and not giving much time to careful reflection and meditation. All the care in the world avails nothing without the Spirit, but a lazy presumption on the Spirit's working is never to be honored by God. We must work the bellows of exegesis ardently and fervently, and yet all the while in humility, praying that God will send his Spirit to enlighten our hearts. For just as God has made it a law that, where the bellows are drawn he sends the wind, so he has made it a spiritual law that, where a believer is seeking to know Christ earnestly, through the careful study of the scriptures, and calling out for the Spirit of illumination, he will not forever be disappointed.

Let us dwell a little more fully upon the nature of these bellows: the first handle, the historical hermeneutic, effectively cuts off many a slipshod and careless misreading of the text. How many well-meaning Christians have isolated a verse

from its historical context, and the flow of thought in which it had originally been delivered to the saints, and thereby perverted it into something it certainly could not have meant, and was never intended to convey? God revealed his message progressively and by slow degrees, to his people whom he had brought to a certain point along their journey, and who had a certain amount of background information to which the message being added would have worked together to form a certain whole; as well as a certain amount of forward-looking and mysterious faith, which recognized in some things a fuller truth merely hinted at in the shadows of dusk, but which would later be revealed in the greater plainness of the mid-day sun. When the historical situation has been lost sight of, many calamities may occur. When Moses proclaimed, "If you do these things, you shall live," it would cast one into eternal ruin to forget the gospel foundation to which this message was added, a foundation everywhere taught and exemplified in the revelation that these saints had already been given. A truth may not without great danger be isolated from the character of its original audience, the state of their needs, the problems it was addressing, and the promises, in varying degrees of clarity, that it was



holding forth to such a people at such a time.

Let us take especial care, then, that we use the bible itself to inform our understanding of the historical background of any passage. There is a reason that the scriptures contain a mixture of histories, didactic materials, and so on; and no one part can stand on its own, but all are mutually buttressed up by the other parts. When we read the psalms, let us note the circumstances which inspired them, to as precise a degree as the original headings, which point to the events recorded in the histories, enable us. When we read the prophets, let us set them against the backdrop of their own day, and only then trace out their portraits of a coming day. The foretelling of the prophets points from something to something, and until the starting point is made clear, the ending point must be obscure. Just as we require a series of points to line up, in order to extend a line in a precise direction, so we need the whole flow of redemptive history to sight down, and thus determine the direction toward which the prophets are looking. And so it is with many other things: unless we retain a broad view of the scriptures, fully-informed by the flow of redemptive history, the circumstances in which

they came, and many other contextual factors, we are opening ourselves up to many false interpretations, which will settle like filthy dross on the pure gold we have dugged up.

The second handle we must grasp, if we would work the bellows of exegesis, is the handle of grammar. God designed human language to be governed by a very definite set of rules, and it is the simplest truth conceivable, yet a truth which, to grasp firmly must be the death-blow to an innumerable host of false doctrines, that a statement simply cannot mean in truth what it does not mean grammatically. The statement “Whosoever will may come,” gives a definite result contingent upon a variable which is not assumed: if a person so desires, without saying whether this or that person or none at all ever will desire; then, he certainly has permission to come to God. The sentence can never be twisted around to mean, “All are able of themselves to change their evil desires, and so be willing to come”. If one were to say, “Whoever jumps to the surface of the sun will be scorched,” he would be speaking the truth; but it would be foolishness to wrest his words into the proposition, “All are able to jump to the surface of the sun”. See by what a simple

observation of grammar we have put to rest a thousand different arguments on the lips of a hundred thousand misguided souls? In this and innumerable other ways, we must put the test of grammar to our theology, and where it fails to stand up to the test, we must cast it into the fire; it is certainly dross.

The sum of all this is that, we must always take pains to read carefully and intentionally. Let us ever be asking ourselves, “What does this word mean? How does this author use it elsewhere? What is he saying about it? How does what he says here relate to the next sentence? Does it provide a condition necessary for the fulfillment of any other statement? Does it give a purpose or justification for what he has stated elsewhere? How does it fit into the flow of thought that this author has been taking pains to unfold?” It is a strenuous task to read the scriptures so thoughtfully, but we may be sure that if we read them lazily, many precious nuggets will slip us by, and much impurity and dross will remain to corrupt the beauty and value of that gold we already possess.

As we undertake our labors, let us never forget that such careful study may be done in

community, or that training, guidance, and preparation for the labor may be profitably put to use as well. If we feel ourselves unqualified, as all of us indeed are to some degree, let us take the necessary steps to become ever more fitted for so arduous a task, which holds forth the promise of such great profit. If we are young, strong, and unattached, let us seek the tools of Greek and Hebrew grammar and study at the feet of the wise and learned elders of Israel. If we are too feeble or burdened down with other responsibilities and cares, let us comfort ourselves with the truth that, ninety-nine percent of the grammatically-derived errors in currency may be put to flight by a careful reading of any good translation that we have before us; and we are rather to be blamed for not using what we have, than for not having what we are not able to obtain. If we lack practice, let us seek out an experienced believer who can put his hands over our own, and help us to work the bellows by a joint effort, until we are familiar enough to continue on our own, maybe slowly, but diligently and surely. No one of us is able to perfect the art of refining, but all of us are able to apply ourselves more arduously to the task, seek the Spirit's help more faithfully, make a more concerted use of the means that God has laid

before us, and so grow by slow degrees in the knowledge of him in whom is hidden our eternal treasure.



# The Hidden Treasure

## 5. Fashioning the Gold





THE REASON for the surpassing value of gold is to be sought in a unique combination of its various qualities, including such things as its limited availability, imperviousness to corruption, usefulness for a wide array of applications, and not least of all, unrivalled beauty. This last quality is an unexceptional characteristic of valuable materials. In terms of sheer functionality, pewter lacks nothing that sterling silver may boast. But the latter is always prized more highly simply because it is more beautiful. Pewter may be used to feed the body of man just as well as silver; but it can never feed his beauty-starved soul. Pewter may be useful to the trader of household wares, but silver is required by the jeweler or artist.

This latter point leads to an interesting observation: by an intrinsic and immutable property, silver and gold demand a painstaking and exquisite fashioning. This is what they were made for. Wheat was made to be eaten, and by its peculiar quality demands to be threshed, ground, baked, etc., for the most appropriate application of its intended use. Gold was made to be admired, and by its peculiar quality demands to be refined, fashioned, and shaped into exquisite varieties of ornamentation for the most appropriate

application of its intended use. Its native beauty must be drawn out and displayed in a manner becoming its essential worth.

In the same way, the gospel-gold of knowing Jesus is of limitless value for a variety of wonderful properties, being that alone which is able to purify a man from his natural corruptions, give him eternal life, bring him back to the Father, etc.; but one of its chief and most valued qualities is simply its beauty. We were so designed that the beautiful must thrill and satisfy our hearts: whether gazing up at the night stars, listening to the sounds of the ocean surf pounding the seashore, or admiring the works of the world's great poets and artists, when a trace of the beautiful comes across our sensibilities, we respond to it. It both delights us and stirs up a longing for more, revealing a desperate need and desire, and at the same time, in small part, fulfilling them. But the world's broken traces of beauty can never ultimately satisfy man's need for the beautiful. They are brief and tainted glimpses of a greater glory that once was, as if a few beams flashing out from a shattered and mud-stained mirror were all the witness we had left to the sun that so illumined it. Jesus is the true Sun of beauty, and all the things that we have

ever admired on this earth are but imperfect reflections and remembrances of him.

Consider then: if gold, once mined out of the earth and purified in the kiln, must then be fashioned into beautiful chains and ornaments; how much more must the gospel-gold, once digged up from the pages of scripture and purified with a careful and rigorous exegesis, then be fashioned into chains and ornaments well-ordered and lovely? Once we have discovered a wealth of beautiful nuggets, and seen the face of our treasured Savior in a thousand verses, we must be careful not to let the truths we have so obtained lie about in great heaps, but rather fashion them in an orderly manner, so that their beauty might the more readily be seen and appreciated.

We may encounter a glimpse of this sort of careful fashioning of the great redemptive-historical truths in the faithful sayings of the early church, which Paul cites with approval in his pastoral epistles. Consider, for instance, the following:

God was manifest in flesh,  
Justified in Spirit,  
Seen by angels;

Proclaimed among the nations,  
Believed on in the world,  
Received up into glory (I Timothy 3:16).

In this early, creedal formulation, we see the beautiful truths of the gospel condensed, admirably balanced, and carefully displayed in a memorable fashion. The great beauties of Christ have been linked together in a perfect chain, where each individual truth is both augmented by the other truths around it, and in turn serves to augment them. The great realities recorded by the Evangelists have been mined out, purified with painstaking and Spirit-empowered exegesis, and then fashioned into an ornate piece of jewelry, which augments the beauty inherent in the truth.

Ever since apostolic times, the Church has been engaged in this same process. In the long battle against early heresy, the champions of orthodoxy were engaged in fashioning the crude ore of the two testaments into such succinct and well-crafted gems as the Apostolic and Nicene creeds, or else weaving the biblical testimony into long, carefully-forged chains of thoughtful argumentation and explanation, so that the myriad truths of the Scriptures might be understood in all the

orderliness of their manifold inter-relationships, and so that, in turn, simple believers might not be dazzled with the fool's-gold trinkets of heretical systems and philosophies, but rather so enamored with the beautiful and intricate structuring of the genuine gospel that they could no longer be led astray by imposters. When truths are apprehended from the scriptures, they are strong to resist the lies of the Enemy, but as long as they are only clutched loosely and haphazardly in the hand, they may perchance be broken by the subtle sophistries of his lying forgeries. But when they have been all braided together, so that each supports the other, that is, when the way in which they relate to each other is at once seen, the many-fold cord thus fashioned will not be so easily snapped.

This is the usefulness of creeds and confessions. The beauty of the richly diverse and yet marvelously simple message of Jesus Christ and him crucified is set forth in dazzling relief, and the wonder of it all seizes firmly upon the soul, so that one might not readily be drawn away to lesser things. A simple man might be persuaded to trade off a few nuggets of gold for a worthless bauble that shines enticingly, but when those nuggets

have been made into a superior ornament, the inferior nature of the forgery becomes at once evident, so that he will steadfastly refuse to give anything up.

Or else, the minutely-crafted phrases of the early creeds may be compared to so many pegs in a jewelry box. Without them, the whole mass of gospel jewels must lie in a confused heap, but by their aid, each chain and necklace may be put in its place, so that all the riches which the treasure chest holds are at once visible to all. The finely-wrought chains of Theology, Christology, Pneumatology, Soteriology, and so forth, hang in a dazzling array from the creedal expressions, and the great riches of Christendom are put on display for the Church to delight in.

It is the habit of some to despise creeds and confessions, because they think it more noble to be “simply biblical”. It is true that the Christian’s solemn responsibility is to be utterly biblical, and to subject even the oldest and most revered creeds to the test of the scriptures. But the function that these tools have is a necessary function, and it is no more desirable than it is possible to dispense with them altogether. Yes, let them be examined

and refined with each passing generation, but let them not be cast aside altogether. When this happens, confusion results, and one is at a loss even to know what he believes, let alone how to defend it. The scriptures were made to be arranged and ordered so that the fullness of their worth might be apprehended and admired. This is an indispensable task for the believer in pursuit of the gospel-gold. For one to appreciate the terrible glory of Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, he must likewise be aware of the gentle and comfortable glory of Jesus, the Lamb who was slain. These two corollary truths complement and give meaning to each other. And they will not be adequately valued until the gold dugged up from the scriptures is ordered and arranged in designs befitting their diverse beauty. And so it is with many other precious truths beside.

As we turn to the scriptures in high hopes of finding the gospel-gold of knowing Jesus, let us be diligent to fashion the nuggets we encounter in a beautiful and orderly array. When we have uncovered from the pages of John's gospel the golden images of our Savior as the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, etc., let us then forge those notable "I Am" statements into one

beautiful chain, that we might the better admire and rejoice in our newly-gotten wealth. When we have uncovered here and there the silver-likenesses of God's people as a good olive tree, from Psalm 52:8; 128; Hosea 14:5-6; Isaiah 17:4-6; 24:13-15; Jeremiah 11; and Romans 11, let us then forge those nuggets into a mutually-interpretive chain. Let us ever be pursuing the ancient and admirable art of the mosaic, not just collecting many beautiful and precious gems, but then arranging them in such a way as to draw out from the combined testimony of the whole a picture more lovely than any one gem could ever produce alone. That is to say, let us arrange all the truths of the bible, which we have carefully mined out and refined, into an ever-more intimate and detailed portrait of the face of Jesus Christ, who shines with all the glory of eternal beauty, and whose countenance irradiates all the riches of wisdom and knowledge.



# The Hidden Treasure

## 6. Admiring the Gold



IN THE world of men, there are two basic classes of wealth which are ever sought. The first class is composed of those substances which have an inherent worth and beauty, such as silver, gold, and diamonds. The second class is composed of those substances which, though inherently worthless, may be traded for other things of value, such as the ugly paper dollar which might readily be exchanged for all goods and services under the sun, and which is therefore highly prized. The difference between the two is that the latter class only allows one to delight in something other than itself – a man with dollars may find joy in the fine dining and fancy houses for which he might trade them, but little values the look of the paper itself. But the former class inspires admiration by its own intrinsic properties. A diamond dazzles the eye, and is therefore sought for itself, and not just to be traded for other things.

The hidden treasure of the gospel is of the former variety. It is valuable by virtue of its inherent ability to thrill the soul. To have it is to be rich by default, and there is nothing for which one can trade it, because it surpasses all other substances for beauty and desirability. This means that, for one to benefit by its worth, he must admire its

beauty, and not seek to use it for another kind of wealth.

Many professors of religion have missed this point. They think that the worth of the gospel consists of its ability to free us from hell, to give us eternal life, or some other such thing which, although not at all bad in itself, can certainly not be good in itself either, when isolated from its gospel-context. Heaven will be heaven simply because it is the place where Jesus Christ may be known more fully than anywhere else. Hell is hell simply because Jesus is there absent. The gospel currency is not paper money to be traded off for an eternal life of sitting on the clouds with a harp and a halo, it is the pure gold of knowing Jesus, than which nothing could be more valuable. It is its own reward, and can never be traded for any goods or services, except to infinite loss. The gospel gold is wealth that carries its value in itself, and wealth that must be admired to be rightly used.

This is why the figure we have employed for the gospel treasure is gold, and not dollars. And even as we have just seen that the intrinsic beauty of gold is a characteristic which demands that it be

fashioned into a form which draws out its peculiar charm, so we will now see that it is a necessary effect that the gold so fashioned must then be admired. The fashioning is a response rendered necessary by virtue of the gold, but the admiring is a response rendered necessary by virtue of man's own innate sensibilities. The fashioning is a must of obligation, the admiring is a must of natural consequence. The admiration of the gold is thus the effect following the faithful discharge of the duty of fashioning it, and is at the same time the greatest motivation for doing so. Let us lay this truth well to heart, for when we apprehend it, we come to realize that the careful and painstaking labors of love which we bring to bear on the text of God's word are in fact labors which serve to nourish and enrich our very souls. Religion then ceases to be a laborious task that duty demands, and becomes a self-interested pursuit of deep joy and soul-satisfaction, which is at the same time a disinterested confession of the glory of God, to the exclusion of any glory which resides in one's own soul.

But let us be more clear on that point: both the fashioning and admiring of the gospel-gold of knowing Jesus are the highest duties of man, and

his most solemn responsibilities. God demands of us that we pursue and love him with all our hearts, and that, forsaking all other pleasures, we seek our good in him alone. Further, he demands of us that, when we have found him, we be satisfied in him, indeed, overjoyed at his presence. We are to rejoice always, but only in the Lord. To fail to do so involves a most serious and damning dereliction of our greatest duty as creatures of the great God. To fail to do so is to commit the twofold sin, of which every particular sin is just an individual expression, of forsaking the Fountain of living waters, and hewing out broken cisterns which can hold no water.

These two highest duties of man, of pursuing the knowledge of God in all its inherent worth, or in other words, of fashioning aright the gospel-gold of knowing Jesus; and then of rejoicing and being satisfied in it, or in other words (under our figure), of admiring those exquisite ornaments of gold, are most certainly his most humbling and disinterested. To admire something external to oneself is at once to admit that within oneself there is nothing which can satisfy. One can gain an interest in the heavenly Treasure only by disavowing any interest in the treasure of his own

heart. When one admires an ornament of gold instead of a mirror, he is admitting that he is less worthy to be admired than that which captures his attention. He is trading his own glory for the glory of gospel-gold. And in doing this, he is laying his pride in the dust, and humbling himself before the Savior.

But not only is this duty man's most humbling and disinterested; it is at the same time his most rewarding and self-interested, by virtue of the fact that what he is humbly seeking is his own greatest good, and what he must trade in for it is his own greatest misery. The world is full of selfish narcissists drowning in the self-reflecting pools of their own pride. The Christian is he who has discovered, to his delight, that if he leave the miry pool of his own worth, not only does he no longer have to drown, but further, he is thereby freed to look about on that which is much more beautiful than his own little reflection ever could have been. In laying aside the interest of his own self-image, one may thereby avoid his own destruction and find his eternal good. But the trade-off is the humbling recognition that his own natural condition constituted the source of his misery and failure, and that the good which he finally found

was wholly external to himself.

The duty of admiring the hidden treasure of knowing Jesus is man's greatest obligation and highest good. And so the question must arise, "How then does one go about this blessed duty of admiration?". And at the outset, we must realize that there is a wrong answer to this question just as surely as there is a right. We acknowledge that a Christian must seek the true heavenly gold, and we admit that this gold is nothing less than knowing our Savior; and that is well. But many false believers and imposters have likewise admitted that much, and have yet been destitute of any real wealth. How can this be?

You see, there is a kind of seeking that is not for joy, but out of pride. There are some men, wealthy by the standards of the world, who would rather delight in the morose lines of a ledger than in the beauty of the pure gold they have hidden away for fear of thieves. This class of men may think themselves rich by virtue of the piles of gold they never look upon, but for all its practical effect, their wealth is nothing but a few scribbled lines of ink! In actual fact, that poor peasant who has but a little trinket of gold, and who hangs it upon his



wall and rejoices in its beauty every day as he arrives home from the fields, is richer by far than the foolish old gentleman whose coffers are full.

So is it with the currency of scripture. There are men who have sought a true knowledge of the scriptures, and have advanced far in understanding the words and principles set down in their pages, but they have sought this knowledge only in pride, supposing that they may thereby display how worthy and learned they are – when it is at once apparent that the simplest truth in all the bible is that we are unworthy and Christ alone is worthy! These men delight in all their knowledge, but what it really consists of is only ink markings on a page. For all the wealth calculated up in their ledgers, they have never once seen the gold itself, and so they have no understanding of its admirable beauty.

But richer by far are those poor humble saints who have not stored up so much wealth, and do not know the times and circumstances surrounding the recording of the scriptures to so great a degree, but what they have uncovered they hang prominently on their walls, and rejoice in its beauty, and find satisfaction at the end of a hard

day by gazing in wonder on its splendid worth and purity. Their ledgers might record less, but their actual wealth is greater to an untold degree.

There is a species of knowledge which does not measure up to the golden standard of gospel-knowledge. This is the sort of knowledge that the demons have, which causes them to tremble. It is the sort of knowledge that the arrogant professors have, which causes them to boast in their little ledgers. It is the sort of knowledge that can only damn, and can never save.

If we would be rich indeed in the gospel-gold of the Savior, we must not just know that the Lord is good, we must taste and see his goodness on our tongues, with our eyes, and in the depths of our hearts. We must know him as a husband knows his wife, or a father knows his child, and not just as a schoolboy knows Napoleon or Alexander the Great. In other words, if we would truly be rich in the gospel, we must not just have the golden knowledge of our Savior hidden away in our coffers, we must have it on display in the vestibule of our hearts, and we must rejoice in its beauty every day. In fact, if we believe that we have great stores of knowledge hidden away in the ground,

then when our Lord returns, we will find it all vanished away; just as the lord took away the talent of that wicked servant who hid his wealth in a napkin. All the gold that we had treasured up will be found out to be counterfeit; for the true gold is that which, by virtue of its own surpassing excellence, cannot fail to produce admiration. If you believe you have a little gospel gold, and know a little about Jesus, but your heart does not flame up in wonder and worship at the remembrance of what you know, then be assured that your gold is not the gospel-gold after all. It is only a line in a ledger, and it will soon burn away.

What shall we do then, as we labor to be rich indeed? Let us seek to be affected with the truths of the gospel, and not just to have an intellectual awareness of them. Let us not simply endeavor to uncover the truths of the scriptures, let us rejoice and dance and shout for joy at the sight of them. Let us demean our own unworthy and sin-blackened souls, and boast in Christ's goodness alone; for in so doing we will tear ourselves away from the miry pools of pride, where we had all but drowned, and find that ugly reflection replaced by truest beauty and worth. Let us do what God demands of us, and disinterestedly glorify his

name; and let us do so with our own good in mind, knowing that in this way we will make ourselves rich indeed. As we lay up in heaven great heaps of the gospel coin, we will readily see that its obverse is God's glory; its reverse is our own joy; and its name is the knowledge of God. For when God is known for who he truly is, his glorious worth is thereby displayed in a heart of wonder, and thus is he glorified; but in his glorification, we are inundated with the wonder for which we were made, of seeing inexhaustible beauty; and in that wonder is our only eternal joy.

If we would be rich with the hidden treasure, we must look ever to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. We must labor to set before our eyes that which is unseen, and forgetting the things which are seen, press on from day to day in the hope of glory. We must laugh at all the hardships and persecutions which await us on this earth, because we have seen a more excellent inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, which the grace of God is guarding for us in the heavens; and we must shout for joy at the glory of him whom, having not seen we love, and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Friends, the gospel-gold is precious because of its ability to stir up our hearts in wonder and worship! Let us admire and rejoice in the glorious Name of our Savior Jesus Christ every day, as we press on through this vale of tears. Though poor in earthly goods we are rich in everlasting joy, if indeed we have tasted that the Lord is gracious, and have seen his goodness in the face of Jesus Christ, and have felt our hearts overflow in admiration at the wonder of his glory. If we have not yet known this gospel-joy, then let us deplore our own prideful souls, and cry out to the Father of every good gift for his greatest gift of all: the heart-knowledge of the Savior of the world!



# The Hidden Treasure

## 7. Wearing the Gold





ALTHOUGH the labor represented by an intricately-wrought chain of gold is enormous and eminently various, the gold ore having been digged up and refined and painstakingly crafted through many thousands of hours, the final end to which all this diverse toil has been directed may be expressed in this one thing, that the chain be worn about the neck as an ornament of grace and beauty. The woman who delights in fine jewelry is not at all satisfied to rejoice in the beauty of her ornaments as they hang upon the pegs of her jewelry box, but must use them to adorn her own person, so that their own innate loveliness is imparted in some measure to herself. The beauty of the jewelry is never so great as when it enhances the beauty of its owner.

In the same way, King Solomon speaks of wisdom as never so beautiful or profitable as when it enters into the heart, and becomes pleasant to the soul. When it is a merely external treasure of knowledge it retains just its own beauty, but when it is taken into the soul, it becomes a beauty that adorns the character of its possessor, so that he shines with a loveliness that he had never known before. Thus Solomon counsels his children to bind mercy and truth about their neck, and to

write them upon their heart; for thus wisdom, so affectionately embraced, will bring one to honor, and will be for him an ornament of grace and a crown of glory.

Let us lay this counsel to heart as we continue our quest to find the gospel-gold of the knowledge of the Savior; if we are seeking to lay up heaps of gold to delight in only from the secrecy of our own bedrooms, we are not putting it to its right use. When Moses became familiarly acquainted with the Savior, his face was transformed, and began to glow with the beauty that he had gazed upon. In the same way, as we look into the mirror of God's Word, and the Holy Spirit draws back the veil from our hearts, so that we might see and know the Lord Jesus Christ, the effect of this knowledge is that, we soon begin to be changed into the same glorious image which we have rejoiced to gaze upon. In this way, the true gold of knowing Jesus cannot just be piled up, but must eventually serve to adorn its possessor with its own native beauty.

So powerful is this operation that the true gold of the gospel knowledge of Christ cannot fail to have this effect in him who is laying it up. Do you know a man who makes much of knowing many points

of theology, and who prides himself on his familiar knowledge of the bible; and yet who, for all his understanding, ever displays a harsh spirit of indifference to the needs of others less fortunate, who wields a sharp, gossiping tongue to destroy those around him, who gives off an arrogant and condescending air when discussing his great knowledge? Then you may be sure that it is not the gospel gold he has treasured up, but fool's gold after all. The gospel gold must be worn as an ornament of grace, or God will not permit it to be had at all. When one fails to use his talents aright, they will all be taken away and given to him who has put them to a proper use. And when one fails to embrace wisdom in the depths of his soul, and will not use it to adorn his life, he will find himself deprived of all he had hoped to retain.

The truth is, that the hidden treasure can only be grasped and held onto with the firm grip of faith. Without faith, one cannot look to the heavens and rejoice in the glory of the risen Lord, and the beauty of the inheritance he has laid up for all who hope in him. Without faith, one cannot see that which is unseen; and the gospel treasure is called a hidden treasure precisely because it is unseen to the carnal eyes of men.

But consider: what kind of faith is that which does not produce works? It is a dead and impotent faith, and can no more lay hold of the hidden gold than the carnal eye of man can look to that which is invisible. When Abraham bound his son upon the altar, his works justified his faith, even as his faith justified himself. His righteous deeds, as choice fruits, worked together with the vibrant root of his unwavering faith to produce a perfect tree, upon which he might hang all his hopes with certainty. And so we, when we bind our wisdom about our necks, and embrace it in our arms, certify that it is ours indeed.

Remember also the words of our Savior: if you love me, you will keep my commandments. Note the order of this blessed saying: when one has come to know the Savior, so that his heart is stirred with choicest love and tenderest admiration, he cannot help but follow and obey him. If a jeweler has so learned to admire the beauty of his golden chains that he cannot bear to be without them, he will certainly bind them about his neck, and carry them with him wherever he goes. He has grown to delight so fervently in them that he cannot leave them alone.

So too, when one has learned to rejoice in the hidden gold of knowing Jesus, and admires it for its surpassing excellence, he will certainly use it to adorn his life, for he cannot bear to be without it. And the way he does this is by obeying the commands of his Lord. This is because the Lord's commands are all exemplified in his own life of perfect obedience to the Father. When one gazes upon Jesus, he must be struck with the beauty of his character – his meekness and gentleness, his love of the truth, his unwavering commitment to the glory of the Father, and many other such things. And as he learns to love these things, he finds himself wanting to hold them in his breast at all times.

This is why the one who loves Jesus will obey his commandments: because Jesus' commandments are all things that the treasure-seeker has seen in Jesus himself, and has grown to admire. They are not grievous, but eminently desirable. When a man is in love with a woman, he will delight in a scarf that came from her person, and which still retains her smell, because it reminds him of her own loveliness, which it has absorbed to some degree. And so the one who loves Jesus will

delight in his commandments, which have dropped as honey from his own sweet lips, because they have the savor of his own perfect character. Thus the one who loves Jesus will keep his commandments, and his commandments will not be burdensome.

We have seen that the one who has learned to admire the gospel-gold will put it to its proper use by letting it adorn his character. Now let us observe, further, that only by so doing will he be strong to retain his possession of it. When the subtle household thief breaks in by night to steal the treasures of him who is away, he will only take what has been left in the house. Those ornaments which the household master is wearing upon his person will be left untouched. So it is with us; the serpent is an enemy of deceit and treachery, and will steal away the treasures that we have left unguarded; but those that we have used to adorn our person he will not be able to touch. He has been stripped of all his power to harm the Christian by the cross of the Savior, so that he must work by subtle suggestions and lies; but when he is resisted in the name of the Lord Jesus, he will flee at once. He can never steal away the arms of him who is steadfastly resisting, but he can

steal those arms away which he has enticed the foolish soldier to lay down. Let us be careful that we do not give him that opportunity! If we bind our gospel wisdom about our neck, letting our knowledge of the character of the Savior adorn our lives in a righteousness which is imitative of him, our riches can never be plundered away. But when we forsake this wisdom, and begin to gossip and be greedy of perishable riches and doubtful of God's good promises, then we may lose the joy and satisfaction we had from the knowledge of our Savior, and our treasures of gospel-gold, which we had forgotten to bind about our heads as a crown of righteousness, will be plundered away by the serpent.

What a strong motivation we have to apply our knowledge in a proper obedience! For in I John chapter two our Savior has assured us that, if his word abides in us, we will abide in him and in the Father! And again in the third chapter, he confirms that if we keep his commandments, we will abide in him, and he in us. Now, for us to abide in Christ and for him to abide in us is the very essence of the gospel gold. Here is implied a personal knowledge of the most intimate kind, a knowledge reflective of the very mutual indwelling

and inter-relationship of the persons of the most blessed Trinity! This is the gold at its greatest degree of refinement, and our highest joy for all eternity; and we have a most solemn promise from our Savior that if we but wear the gospel chains about our neck, that is, if we take the knowledge we have acquired of our Lord and apply it to our lives in a personal righteousness reflective of the beauty we have seen in him, then we will continue steadfast in our possession of this golden treasure of an intimate and personal relationship with God. Our treasure will then never be stolen away by the deceitfulness of riches, the cares of this world, and the whispered lies of the Serpent, but will only grow in our hearts, filling us with a joy and wonder that can never fade away.

Friends, if you have glimpsed the face of Jesus, let his glorious image start to shine from your own countenance! Let the knowledge of him permeate your heart and soul so that you start to give off the same fragrance. Let his commandments be your delight, inasmuch as they are suggestive of his own lovely person, and let the keeping of them be no burdensome thing. Fashion your gospel gold into finest chains and wear them about your neck, so that your whole life might shine with the beauty



of the Lord; for in so doing, you will become rich indeed, with a treasure that can never be taken away.



# The Hidden Treasure

## 8. Giving Away the Gold



IT IS A singular characteristic of the wealthy men of this world, that they are almost without exception parsimonious, and cling tightly to the great riches they possess. It would seem a dictate of logic that, according as one could give without jeopardizing his own security and position, he would feel more free to do so with indifference. In reality, it is often those most pressed for necessary finances, and those whose ability to provide for themselves the most basic wants is in question from day to day, who are the most willing to give to others. Thus, the wealthy tend to preserve their wealth through greediness, and the poor tend to discourage any accumulation of wealth through liberality.

The matter stands in precisely the opposite case when it comes to the gospel gold. Those who are rich in the gospel are ever compelled by the greatness of their wealth to give it all away; and those who give little or grudgingly show thereby that they have little to give after all. But here is the mystery: the effect of this contrary attitude tends toward precisely the same result as we have observed in the case of the worldly-rich – in the one situation as well as the other, the poor tend to remain poor, while the rich grow richer yet. What

can account for this strange enigma?

The only explanation can be that, when it comes to the gospel-coin, to give away is actually to receive. To give is to get, in a very unalterable sense, and the more the currency is doled out freely, cheerfully, and with a heart of love, the more it multiplies itself in the coffers from which it is distributed. Thus that saying of the Lord is firmly established, that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

This is because the nature of the gospel gold is the knowledge of the Savior. But we have already made it clear, that the sort of intellectual knowledge of him which even the demons have is nothing but worthless fool's gold. The hidden treasure of the gospel consists in a knowledge of Christ which is heartfelt and joyful, and which surpasses for intimacy even the closest human relationships. It is a knowledge which shares in all of his attitudes and emotions, and follows the same path that his own feet have trod. It is a knowledge of experience and personal identification, which can never be had through the mere analysis of a few theological propositions, but springs up in a living union and a shared

destiny.

Now what this means is that, if we would grow richer in the gospel gold, we must know Christ more deeply in the full range of his characteristics, attitudes, and experiences; and as we look at his blessed life upon this earth, we immediately find that it was a life full of the sacrificial giving away of himself for the highest good of others, that is, in order to bring them to God, in whom is their greatest and lasting joy. If we would know him intimately in this ministry, it cannot just be by an operation of the mind, but through the whole person, sharing in the same kinds of experiences that he underwent, and knowing through them all the same soul-sustaining joy that once supported him in his most trying times, and that will now support us in any difficulty which we face, through our union with him.

So it is that the apostle Paul, when he had roundly derided all the dung-heap wealth he had treasured up before, and had traded it off for the personal knowledge of Christ instead, was not content just to ask that he might know him in the power of his resurrection while avoiding the fellowship of his sufferings, but asked positively for a measure of

each, so that he might feel the full range of the excellencies of Jesus Christ at operation in his own soul, as he walked the same path that our Savior had walked. A person cannot know the peace that Christ left, his own surpassing gospel peace, unless he knows the same trials through which that peace sustained him. And when one's love of Christ has flamed up to such a degree that he would place his desire to know the Savior above his desire for a life free of any hardships, he then delights to experience persecution for the gospel, for through it he will obtain a more lively knowledge of the Savior in his sufferings.

Now, do you see how it is that the one who gives becomes richer yet? The gospel gold is knowing Jesus. The one who gives of himself sacrificially, and lets his body be beaten and his words mocked and derided, not just because he enjoys suffering, but because through this pain he hopes to bring others to the place of their only and all-satisfying joy, in a restored relationship with God – this one is able to experience an identification with Christ in a fuller range of his various operations, and so grows much richer in the gospel currency. By giving away the gospel gold, he heaps up more of it for himself, and in this way, though rich before,



he becomes richer yet by giving away everything, and so following the example of Christ.

This one principle has for two thousand years served as the massive and unshakable foundation of the Christian mission. The more that believers have been beaten and persecuted, the more their zeal has been enflamed to tell the world about their Savior, because they have been graced to obtain a fuller knowledge of him through those very sufferings. And the more their hearts overflow with selfless, Spirit-wrought passion, the more unbelievers are drawn themselves to look to Christ for that same circumstance-transcending joy, and thus they are transformed into other Christ-lovers, who would likewise cause their wealth to grow by giving themselves away for the good of their persecutors. So then, let him who would be rich indeed give away all that he possesses, yes, even his own soul, for then he will find himself blessed beyond measure.

Of course, one cannot simply give away the gospel gold as if it were physical money. Inasmuch as it consists of a personal acquaintance with Jesus, it can only be gathered through personal means, and can never be vicariously won. A person is never

rich in the hidden treasure simply by virtue of his relationship to others who are. A father may be rich himself, but he can never give away his gold to his children, but only through prayer and diligent instruction assist them to go out and gather the treasure for themselves. Even Paul, when he was ready to give away his own share in Christ to his hardhearted kinsmen, was not at all able to do so, but instead just mourned bitterly over them. So then, the giving away of the gold to others is not at all a transfer of wealth from our own coffers to theirs; a transfer of that nature can take place only at one location, and that is at the cross of Christ, where he willingly became poor so that we might become rich, and truly placed in our coffers his own accumulated treasures of righteousness, while taking into his own bosom our putrid, stinking mass of sin. Instead, our giving follows in that same example, by which we learn to give ourselves away, in order to lead others to the cross, where they might make the same blessed exchange we have made. Jesus suffered to buy our pardon; we now suffer to proclaim that pardon has been bought. He suffered to win our great treasure; we now suffer to show others where it is to be found.

How do we go about this self-giving task of pointing others to the hidden treasure of the Savior? First, we must be willing to tell them of the gold that we have found. We are beggars who have found a great feast, lepers who have found a free cure, paupers who have found a source of inexhaustible wealth. How shameless we should be if we turned our back on the other beggars and lepers and paupers of the world, and lived a life of indolence in our newly acquired life of prosperity! If those lepers who found the camps of the enemy abandoned, with food aplenty for their starving brothers in the city, feared at their reaction should they find out that they had hidden their knowledge from them, how much more should we fear to be found out on the day of judgment, if we have refused to tell the world of the treasure we have found in Jesus? Will we not then be as the wicked debtor in the parable, who refused to give a little leniency to another servant indebted to him, when he had been shown much leniency from his own lord? And will we not then suffer the same fate, and be cast into outer darkness, if we are ashamed to tell of the One who has made us rich in the knowledge of God? Arise then, and beat the hedges and byways! We have found the buried treasure, hidden in the gospel field – let us tell

others what a wondrous field it is, and urge them with all our might to sell all their belongings that they might have a share of it too.

Second, we must not only tell others where the gold is to be found, but we must also boast in its surpassing worth and beauty. The gold we have found is not just any gold, it is the rarest and finest treasure that the world has ever known – so let us shout its praises! How do we do this? By singing with all our hearts when the blows of the enemy fall upon us the hardest. By rejoicing fervently when we are wronged or maligned. But committing ourselves confidently to God when we have lost our jobs, or have children who are going astray, or have just been diagnosed with cancer. We boast in the gospel gold most tellingly when we live in such a way as to make it obvious that our joy transcends all the circumstances of this life. When one says with his lips, “I love Jesus,” but complains and groans when trials come, who will listen to him? What he is really saying is that, “Jesus can give me a little joy, but not so much that the devil can’t take it all away”. He is saying, “The peace that Jesus gives is like the world’s peace after all, tied to the state of worldly affairs”. Friends, we know that this is not true! We have,

each one of us who belongs to Christ, tasted a joy and peace that the world can never take away; then let us boast in what we have, so that others might share in our knowledge! Let us glory in the cross of Christ, from which flows our unceasing store of every good and perfect gift, from now to eternity, and compel other miserable beggars to come and drink from the same bountiful spring!

Finally, we must be willing to wear the gospel gold, and thus to display it before the world. So glorious is our treasure, that mere words can never convey its charm and beauty. It can only be admired properly when it is seen. But how is the gold of our Savior's excellent character seen today, when he is bodily at the right hand of the Father? It is seen in the lives of his saints, who still function as his mystical body on earth. When the world persecutes and mocks us for our righteousness, and we respond in meekness and love, and would gladly give up our bodies to their spiteful blows, if in so doing we might help them find their eternal joy, then they see Christ shining through his members upon the earth; for it is only through a vital union with Christ that a man can respond in such a way. Christ suffered once in his physical body, to bear our sins and win our

redemption. But his work is not quite done, for now he is suffering in his mystical body, to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, and spread the results of that redemption he has already accomplished. We are blessed to be a part of that glorious labor, and as we engage in the mission, giving ourselves away so that others might be brought to Christ, we are then treasuring up a most abundant and lively knowledge of the Savior in his sufferings, and assuring ourselves of an equally intimate knowledge of the Savior in his resurrection power.

We have now uncovered the hidden treasure, and our riches can never be numbered. Let us up and be laboring, seeking with all our strength to know the Lord Jesus Christ in all his diverse excellency, to fellowship with him in all of his operations, and to draw in many other beggars, wretches for whom he died, to the same blessed union with him in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge from the foundation of the world.