

Sermon

THE MAKING OF JEWELS

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Introduction:

Twenty-five years ago, I was sent overseas to Thailand during the Vietnam War. I was assigned to a tour of duty in B 52's called "Arc Light." I had been married only eight months, and to help cope with the loneliness of being apart, I learned a new hobby: lapidary. This art of cutting gemstones was being taught by local Thai craftsmen at the air base where I was stationed. I was sure this would be useful, especially from my wife's point of view.

S.P.S.:

Just recently I was intrigued by the use of an analogy to this gem making process in an oft quoted millennial verse found in Mal. 3:17. "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." Imagine - God making us His jewels, His special treasure! What incredible symbolism there is to be found in the qualities that make a jewel valuable and in the process it takes to fashion one. Let's begin by noting the qualities that make a gem valuable.

Body:

First and most obvious to the eye is the natural beauty of the stone that comes from its light dispersing quality. This may be the inherent reflected color of the stone or it may be produced by refraction as light passes through the stone and is separated into colors. This can be the result of the natural structure within the stone as is the case with opal, or the cut of the stone such as a diamond. But regardless of how it is dispersed, it is the effect of light that brings out the gem's beauty. That light doesn't arise from within the stone.

Our beauty, as well, doesn't arise from ourselves. It's the effect of the light we reflect. I John 1:5 tells us God is light. In John 8:12 Christ states, "I am the light of the world".

Now some may recall in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:14) that Christ tells his disciples "you are the light of the world". But we should always realize where our "light" comes from, and that is Christ himself (Eph. 5:14).

A second quality that makes a gem valuable is its durability or hardness. Obviously, for something to be valuable it must last. Here diamond sets the scale at 10, a sapphire is 9, glass is 7, but an opal is less than 6, which is why it is considered only semi-precious. This I know only too well as I've cut a replacement opal for my wife's ring at least five times before we decided on a triplet opal, which has a clear sapphire cap.

Here, again, for us to be valuable to God, we must be able to last, to "endure to the end", according to Matt 10:22. To be durable, we must resist the abrasion and stress of this

life without wearing out or cracking and still remain faithful. "He who overcomes and keeps my works until the end" will be given power over the nations. (Rev. 2:26)

A third quality that contributes to the value of a gem is its rareness; simply put, how difficult is it to find. We see at this time only a few being called. We're told we are a "little flock", and according to Matt 7:14, "narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life and there are few who find it". That makes us special to God now, because we are few in number.

A final quality that makes a gem valuable is the absence of any flaws or imperfections within the finished stone. This means no cracks, inclusions, even color distribution, as well as precise cutting. It is the job of the cutting and polishing process to remove flaws and in that we also find a beautiful analogy.

We're told in Matt 5:48 to "become perfect". How is this accomplished? By carefully noting the cutting and polishing process, we can see what God is endeavoring to accomplish in us.

First, the natural rough stone is selected from "out in the world" where it was produced. It is interesting to note that the more valuable stones underwent the most intensive heat and pressure to produce them. During this selection process, it is necessary to "see" into the stone past the dull, rough exterior. This may require rough grinding, cutting, or breaking the stone, but almost invariably, water is used in the process to wet the surface to examine the inside. (In some cases, such as star sapphire, mineral oil is also used to determine proper orientation.) We immediately see a comparison with God's Holy Spirit in our selection or calling. (John 7:37, 38)

The next step in the process is rough grinding to remove all non-gem material, imperfections, and to size the finished stone. Here again water must be constantly applied in just the right amount to keep the stone from cracking due to the heat, and to wash away the debris produced during grinding.

II Cor. 4:16 tells us, "even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day". We see the analogy of "water" again being applied daily to help us through our trials, which according to James 1:2-4 are to help, perfect us.

The final step in the gem making process is the polishing. Here jeweler's rouge (cerium oxide) is mixed with water to make a paste. The stone is dipped in this mixture and then pressed against a felt buffing wheel. This shines the exterior to allow light in (and out). We can see in our "polishing" the chance to put into practice the light we've been given, to reflect it to the world. Rom. 12:2 tells us to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind" which is exactly what this gem making process has accomplished in us. We're transformed into something beautiful. We become valuable to God - jewels to attract others to the light we reflect.

Conclusion:

Now let's see the end of the matter and note what these jewels become. Rev. 21:19 describes the foundation of New Jerusalem (the bride of Christ according to verse 9) as adorned with all kinds of precious stones and, as always, God is the only source of light.

Who then will be there? Verse 27 tells us: those written in the Lamb's "book of life", which brings us back to the verse before Mal. 3:17 - where a similar "book of remembrance" is also mentioned. And what were these future "Jewels" doing that God took such note? They "spoke to one another"! They were sharing their faith, "not forsaking the assembling together", and obviously "about their Father's business"!

So let's get back to the "old grind"; the finished jewels are definitely worth it!