

“The Matchless Pearl”

A heavy splash was followed by many ripples and then the water below the pier was still. An American crouched on the low Indian pier; his eyes riveted on the place where a stream of little bubbles rose to the surface from deep under the water. In a moment a black head appeared and a pair of bright eyes looked up. Then the old Indian pearl diver was clambering onto the dock; grinning and shaking the water from his shining oiled body.

"As nice a dive as I have ever seen, Rambhau!" cried David Morse, the American missionary.

"Look at this one, sahib," said Rambhau, taking a big oyster from between his teeth, "I think it will be good."

Morse took it and while he was prying it open with his pocketknife Rambhau was pulling other smaller oysters from his loincloth.

"Rambhau! Look!" exclaimed Morse, "Why, it's a treasure!"

"Yes, a good one," shrugged the diver.

"Good! Have you ever seen a better pearl? It's perfect, isn't it?" Morse had been turning the large pearl over and over and then handed it to the Indian.

"Oh, yes, there are better pearls, much better. Why, I have one.." his voice trailed off. "See this one, the imperfections, the black speck here, this tiny dent, even in shape it is a bit oblong, but good enough as pearls go."

"Your eye is too sharp for your own good, friend," lamented Morse. "I would never ask for a more perfect pearl!"

"It is just as you say of your God. To themselves people look perfect, but God sees them as they really are." The two men started down the dusty road to the town.

"You're right, Rambhau. And God offers perfect righteousness to all who will simply believe and accept His free offer of salvation. Can't you see that, my friend?"

"No, sahib. As so many times before I have told you, it's too easy. That is where your religion breaks down. I cannot accept that. Perhaps I am too proud. I must work for my place in heaven, or I would always be uncomfortable."

"Oh, Rambhau!" Behind the missionary's words were years of prayer for this man. "Don't you see, you'll never get to heaven that way. There is only one way to heaven. And see, Rambhau, you are getting older now. Perhaps this is your last season of diving for pearls. If you ever want to see heaven's gates of pearl, you must accept the new life God offers you in His Son."

"My last season! Yes, you are right. Today was my last day of diving. This is the last month of the year, and I have preparations to make."

"You should be making preparations for the life to come."

"That's just what I'm going to do. Do you see that man over there? He is a pilgrim, perhaps to Bombay or Calcutta. He walks barefooted and picks the sharpest stones, and see, every few rods he kneels down and kisses the road. That is good. The first day of the New Year I also begin my pilgrimage. All my life I have planned it. I shall make sure of heaven this time. I am going to Delhi on my knees."

"Man! You're crazy! It's nine hundred miles to Delhi! The skin will break on your knees and you'll have blood poisoning or leprosy before you get to Bombay."

"No, I must get to Delhi. And then the immortals will reward me. The suffering will be sweet, for it will purchase heaven for me."

"Rambhau! My friend! You can't! How can I let you do this when Jesus Christ has died to purchase heaven for you!"

But the old man could not be moved. "You are my dearest friend on earth, Sahib Morse. Through all these years you have stood beside me. In sickness and want you have been sometimes my only friend. But even you cannot turn me from this great desire to purchase eternal bliss. I must go to Delhi."

It was useless. The old pearl diver could not understand, could not accept the free salvation of Christ.

One afternoon Morse answered a knock at the door to find Rambhau there.

"My good friend!" cried Morse. "Come in."

"No," said the pearl diver, "I want you to come with me to my house, sahib, for a short time. I have something to show you. Please do not say no."

The heart of the missionary leaped. Perhaps God was answering prayer at last. "Of course I'll come," he said.

"I leave for Delhi just one week from tomorrow, you know," said Rambhau as they approached his house ten minutes later. The missionary's heart sank.

Inside Morse was seated on the chair his friend had built especially for him, where many times he had sat explaining to the diver God's way to heaven. Rambhau left the room to return soon with a small but heavy English strongbox.

"I have had this strongbox for years," he said. "I keep only one thing in it. Now I will tell you about it. Sahib Morse, I once had a son."

"A son! Why, Rambhau, you never said a word about him!"

"No, sahib, I couldn't."

Even as he spoke the diver's eyes were soon moistened. "Now I must tell you, for soon I will leave, and who knows whether I shall ever return? My son was a diver, too. He was the best pearl diver on the coasts of India. He had the swiftest dive, the keenest eye, the strongest arm, and the longest breath of any man who sought for pearls. What joy he brought to me! He always dreamt of finding a pearl beyond all that had ever been found. One day he found it. But when he saw it, he had already been under water too long. He lost his life soon after." The old pearl diver bowed his head and for a moment his whole body shook, but there was no sound.

"All these years I have kept the pearl," he continued, "but now I am going, not to return, and to you, my best friend, I am giving my pearl."

The old man worked the combination on the strongbox and drew from it a carefully wrapped package. Gently opening the cotton, he picked up a mammoth pearl and placed it in the hand of the missionary. It was one of the largest pearls ever found off the coast of India, and it glowed with a luster and brilliance never seen in cultured pearls. It would have brought a fabulous sum in any market. For a moment the missionary was speechless and gazed on the pearl with awe.

"Rambhau! What a pearl!"

"That pearl, sahib, is perfect," replied the Indian quietly.

The missionary looked up quickly with a new thought.

"Rambhau, this is a wonderful pearl, an amazing pearl. Let me buy it. I would give you ten thousand dollars for it."

"Sahib! What do you mean?"

"Well, I will give you fifteen thousand dollars for it, or if it takes more I will work for it."

"Sahib," said Rambhau, stiffening his whole body, "this pearl is beyond all price. No man in all the world has money enough to pay what this pearl is worth to me. On the market a million dollars could not buy it, I will not sell it to you. You may only have it as a gift."

"No, Rambhau, I cannot accept that. As much as I want the pearl, I cannot accept it that way. Perhaps I am too proud, but that is too easy. I must pay for it, or work for it."

The old pearl diver was stunned.

"You don't understand at all, sahib. Don't you see? My only son gave his life to get this pearl, and I wouldn't sell it for any money. Its worth is in the life-blood of my son. I can't sell this, but I can give it to you. Just accept it in a token of the love I bear you."

The missionary was choked and for a moment could not speak. Then he gripped the hand of the old man.

"Rambhau," he said in a low voice, "don't you see? That is just what you have been saying to God."

The diver looked long and searchingly at the missionary and slowly; slowly he began to understand.

"God is offering to you salvation as a free gift. It is so great and priceless that no man on earth could buy it. Millions of dollars are too little. No man on earth could earn it. His life would be millions of years too short. No man is good enough to deserve it. It cost God the life-blood of His only Son to make the entrance for you into heaven. In a million years, in a hundred pilgrimages, you could not earn that entrance. All you can do is to accept it as a token of God's love for you, a sinner. Rambhau, of course I will accept the pearl in deep humility, praying God I may be worthy of your love. Rambhau, won't you accept God's great gift of heaven, too, in deep humility knowing it cost Him the death of His only Son to offer it to you?"

Great tears were rolling down the face of the old man. The veil was lifting. He understood at last.

"Sahib, I see it now. I have believed in the doctrine of Jesus for two years, but I could not believe that His salvation was free. Now I understand. Some things are too priceless to be bought or earned. Sahib, I accept His offer of salvation."

Friend, may we ask you, before God, are you attempting to merit salvation in some way, or have you taken God at His Word and received Christ, God's unspeakable Gift, as your Saviour? The Scriptures unmistakably declare:

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." -- (Ephesians 2:8-9)