

BARRATT MINISTRIES CHALLENGE

Issue 49

DON'T CAST PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

Sermon on the Mount Series, Matthew 7.6

by Maurice Barratt

“A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness” (Proverbs 12.23)

The verses at the beginning of Matthew 7 are keys to the kingdom. We have come a long way since the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. We have seen our goal, the character of Christ; we have been exposed and seen how far short we fall of it. We have seen the roots of all our problems, covetousness and the hypocrisy that covers it up. And we have seen the way to deal with this secret life: by another secret life, the life of secret prayer, fasting and giving. Now we have come to the place where Jesus can give us wisdom.

In the last issue we saw that when Jesus says “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs”, he is talking about natural, physical things which we dedicate to God. The danger there was of mixture, of dedicating things to God’s use and then also using them for the world, which is defiling a holy thing. But with the next statement, “neither cast ye your pearls before swine” it is different; this is not about mixture, nor about physical things.

Key Words

Let’s first examine the key words in the sentence.

“Cast” can signify two things: it can mean to throw away as waste or useless (cast away, cast off); or it can mean to invest, to throw something out with the aim of gaining something in return (to cast a net, to cast seed, to “cast your bread upon the waters”). So Jesus is telling us two things: not to throw away our “pearls”, but also not to regard them as something to be invested for return. Pearls are precious in themselves; they’re not like money, a commodity for trading and investment; they’re more like the reward of investment.

We will examine the meaning of “swine” in detail later, but for now it is enough to say that it signifies people who don’t appreciate what you have to offer. Pearls are meaningless to pigs.

Pearls

Pearls are only mentioned 8 times in the entire bible. It is worth considering the nature and formation of pearls. They are quite different from precious stones (which are formed underground

through tremendous heat and pressure), and quite different from gold and silver (which have to be extracted from ore and refined in a furnace). Diamonds need cutting and polishing, gold needs purifying, but pearls come out perfect.

The perfection of the pearl comes through suffering. A pearl is formed when a grain of sand or grit gets inside the oyster's shell and irritates it. To stop the pain, the oyster secretes a smooth substance around the grit which hardens into a pearl. The worse the pain, the bigger the pearl. Out of an oyster, an unclean animal, something beautiful and precious is formed. This is a pattern repeated in creation. Horrible smelly manure in your garden produces beautiful perfumed roses and delicious apples. Death brings life. A grain of wheat has to die in the ground to bring a harvest. Beauty comes out of brokenness. So pearls signify the precious things which you learn through personal suffering and trial.

Pearls appear in the bible as the attire of a woman. In 1 Timothy 2.9 Paul urges women not to be arrayed "with broidered hair, or gold, or pearls". The significant thing here is that it is women, not men, who like to wear pearls to beautify themselves; for the church is also a woman who wants to beautify herself. So we also read of pearls in association with two specific women: the harlot and the bride.

The Harlot and the Bride

In Revelation 17.4 the harlot, Babylon, the worldly counterfeit of the bride, wears pearls; and in Revelation 18.12,16 pearls are listed among the commodities of the merchants who traded with Babylon. Then in Revelation 21.21 we see that the gates of the New Jerusalem, the wife of the Lamb, are made of pearl. There is a big difference here: the harlot wears pearls as an outward ornament, but the bride has pearl as a part of her very nature, inwrought into her being. Babylon, the harlot, has the right outward appearance, like any counterfeit, but in reality she has never suffered: quite the opposite, she has "glorified herself and lived deliciously ... she saith in her heart, I sit as a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow" (Revelation 18.7). But the bride has been changed in her nature and perfected through trials and suffering. The New Testament reiterates the theme again and again: "We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14.22). The gates are the entry to the city, and in the Sermon on the Mount, just a few verses on from where we are, Jesus tells us we must "enter in at the strait (narrow) gate" (Matthew 7.13).

Proverbs and Parables

There is a difference between a proverb and a parable. A proverb is a wise saying, a piece of common sense which is clearly understood. But a parable is hidden knowledge; it is mysterious and not revealed without a key. Jesus said that he spoke in parables so that the crowds would not understand, but he revealed the mysteries only to the disciples (Matthew 13.10-13). A pearl is like a parable; its significance is personal and precious to you, but on other people it is wasted. They can never understand it, because they have not shared your experience. Paul talks about a hidden wisdom: "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world ... we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom ..." (1 Corinthians 2.6,7). But Paul

goes on to say that the carnal Christian does not understand this wisdom, and that the Corinthians fell into that category. “I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal” (1 Corinthians 3:1). Carnal Christians won’t understand pearls. Pearls only come through maturity, and Christian maturity comes through trials and suffering.

Swine

Swine are unclean animals (Leviticus 11.7). The prodigal son ended up feeding swine and sharing their food (Luke 15.15,16). It’s the end of the road of carnality and degradation that comes from leaving your heavenly Father; the ultimate backslidden state. Demons besought Jesus that if he cast them out they might go into a herd of swine (Matthew 8.31). Peter warns of false prophets, comparing them to swine, and makes it clear that they are people who have once been Christians but have now become unclean. They had once “escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” — but “they are again entangled therein ... it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment ... But it is happened to them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Peter 2.20-22).

So swine can refer to people in the world, or carnal Christians, or false prophets. Sharing pearls with these people will not only do no good, but it may do you harm. They will not only “trample them under their feet”, they may also “turn again and rend you” (Matthew 7.6).

Jesus

Jesus, of course, put his sayings into practice himself. He told many things only to the disciples in secret. “His disciples came to him privately” (Matthew 24.3) and he told them much about the end of the world. He told parables, mysteries, to the crowds, but revealed their meaning only to the disciples in private (Matthew 13.10-16). He would not cast his pearls to the Pharisees, the crowds, or the Gentiles.

Paul

Paul also spoke of mysteries: “Behold, I shew you a mystery ...” (1 Corinthians 15.51); “I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery ...” (Romans 11.25); “by revelation [God] made known unto me the mystery ...” (Ephesians 3.3) — but he only spoke of these things to the church. To the world he spoke only the “foolish preaching” of the cross.

My Experience

I have sometimes had the opportunity to share an experience or revelation which has been personal and precious to me, and afterwards I wished I hadn't, because not only has it been wasted on the person I was sharing with, because they didn't understand it, but it has backfired on me, because they have misunderstood it. People will always "understand" you somehow, and if they don't understand your true meaning they will misunderstand you and take a wrong meaning. Sometimes I have faced accusations and difficulties simply because I have shared something and been misunderstood, and I could have spared myself the trouble if I had kept the "pearl" to myself. Proverbs 12.23 is right: It's a wise and prudent man who conceals his knowledge.

EXPERIENCES FROM LIFE

by Joanna Barratt

CAN YOU BE TRUSTED WITH PEARLS?

I racked my brains to think of instances where I had cast pearls before swine so that I could talk about it to you, but I realised that if I shared my experiences I could so easily be in danger of doing exactly the same thing again ... because I don't know you, do I? So, to be on the safe side, I looked at the Bible and found quite a number of examples where people, to different degrees, cast their pearls before swine, and I am certain that you will be able to identify with a couple, if not all, of the examples.

Joseph

Joseph is a good example. To me, Joseph has always stood out as a model Christian. He never seemed to put a foot out of place, finding favour with both God and man, in whatever situation he found himself. His father was of this opinion too, and because he was such an ideal son he was favoured with a wonderful gift — a coat of many colours — which was an outward sign to his eleven brothers that his father loved him more than them. They hated him because of it, it was proof of their father's feelings for him, and yet Joseph was so pure minded that he wasn't even aware of their obvious jealousy and hatred.

The Bible says, "to the pure all things are pure" (Titus 1.15) and Joseph was so naive that he didn't even realise they had a problem with him. So when God gave him a dream which let him know that one day his parents and brothers would all bow down before him, he was unafraid to share it with them. Even though his father was disturbed at what this dream inferred, Joseph told them the second dream God gave him to confirm the first. Needless to say, when Jacob asked Joseph to see how his brothers were doing on the hills, he had no idea the fate they had cooked up for him. He

ended up being sold into slavery, thank God! It could have been worse, they had originally intended to kill him!

An Unwise Trust

Joseph had trusted his brothers. Is that wrong? Yes, if they are only brothers on the outside and not on the inside. There are many in the church of God who masquerade as brothers, but they are really wolves in sheep clothing. On a number of occasions, now I look back, I can see instances where I have unwisely entrusted my so-called brethren in the church with revelations that God had given to me personally. Instead of being blessed at the things I shared they have often been jealous of even the fact that God has spoken to me (as if He shouldn't, after all we are supposed to have a PERSONAL relationship with Him), and instead of being encouraging, they have doused me and implied that I have been presumptuous. This is just one of the ways new Christians lose the fire God has baptised and blessed them with, and it's usually the older, settled, inactive Christians who throw the water on their excited flames.

The Wise Men

What is your opinion of the wise men who always seem to appear on the Christmas cards? Until recently, I never gave it much thought, but after a conversation with Maurice I realised that they indeed were a tool of the devil. These men were star-gazers, they read the future by the way the stars were arranged in the heavens, thus when they saw the new star they realised that a new king had been born. This was indeed revelation. God puts the stars in the sky, this was revelation from God. But they were not godly men, they were worldly, carnal, and cast this incredibly important revelation before a despot — Herod. Why didn't they go to the leaders of the Jews, or someone in the synagogue who was watching and waiting for the Messiah? Because Satan wanted to destroy this new king. Just as Pharaoh had killed all the baby boys who were aged two years and under which forced Moses to be hidden for his own safety, so Herod destroyed all the baby boys two years and under and an angel was sent to tell Joseph and Mary to flee to Egypt with Jesus lest Herod should find and kill him.

The wise men were not wise at all, they nearly fouled up the whole plan of God because they spoke out their revelation in ungodly ears. There are many God-haters in the world who would do anything to destroy or thwart God's plans from coming to pass. Look at what Hitler did to the Jews during the last war, and still there are those who would do anything within their power to wipe out the Jewish nation entirely.

Solomon - The Worst Example

I suppose Solomon is the very worst example I could bring from scripture. This man was abundantly blessed by God. The Bible states that "God loved Solomon" (2 Samuel 12.24) and Solomon loved God and wanted with all his heart to follow in the footsteps of his father David. He built the temple,

God's house, and was lavish with the gold and precious materials which were used. No expense seemed too great, and when it was finished the dedication ceremony was also excessive, as thousands of sacrifices were killed and offered to the Lord. Indeed God was so pleased with the outward show of Solomon's love that the glory of God fell on the temple and the priests were unable to perform their duties.

Solomon's Wisdom

That very night God appeared to Solomon in a dream and asked him what gift he desired. Solomon asked for wisdom to rule the people and God was so pleased with this request that he granted his desire, but promised wealth, long life, and the things he didn't ask for also. God said there would be no-one as wise as Solomon, either before or after him. His fame went throughout the world and people, kings and queens, travelled from tremendous distances to see his wealth and hear his wisdom, and marvelled at this incredibly gifted man. But his blessing became his downfall. It records in scripture that Solomon added to himself all the things that kings were specifically advised not to — horses, women, etc. In fact Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines! And these women were not all Jewish either, they were from other lands and came to him with their own personal gods. Solomon built houses for his wives and places for them to worship their gods, and eventually his love for these women turned his eyes and heart away from God, so that he also worshipped the gods of his wives.

Solomon's Backsliding

The gifts and callings of God are without repentance, the Bible says (Romans 11.29). God didn't take Solomon's wisdom away just because he backslid, which is a shame really, because Solomon is reputed to have backslidden so badly that those in witchcraft and the Freemasons trace their religion back to the writings of Solomon. He wrote much when he was a godly man, but it seems he also wrote much when he was fallen from grace. Another name for the "Star of David" which Christians are keen to wear, thinking it to be a godly Jewish symbol (I have yet to come across this "Star of David" in scripture), is known to those in witchcraft as "Solomon's Seal" and is considered by them to be a powerful symbol. It appears that when Solomon turned from God he really did become a "swine" and trampled the pearls that God gave to him underfoot, and turned on His Creator to rend Him.

The Danger of Knowledge

Jesus used to speak in parables, and when the disciples questioned the reason for this He said, "this people's heart is become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (Matthew 13.15). There are divine truths that God just doesn't want to share with everyone. We have to have our hearts in the right condition before He can trust us with certain information and power. So much damage has

been done to the Kingdom of God by those who are full of knowledge of the scripture, but lead their own ungodly lives.

Mary and Joseph

After looking at various characters in the Bible, I have come to the conclusion that God is always looking for people like Mary and Joseph to entrust with His secrets. Such a young girl to be told by an angel that she would bear the Son of God without knowing a man, especially when she was already engaged to be married. How could God expect her to keep silent about what she had been told and not even defend herself to her betrothed? And for Joseph, what a secret to have to keep that he was rearing the Messiah? But the Bible records that Mary hid all that happened to her and kept it locked away in her heart (Luke 2.19). We, like God, should be looking for people we can trust, people who have been proved lest we cast our pearls before swine. We also should be people who can be trusted to keep our own counsel and integrity lest we ourselves be in danger of becoming swine.