

The Jewels of God

Music can be very inspiring. Over our years in God's church, most of us have probably heard sermons and sermonettes that have been inspired by various pieces of music. Often these inspired messages have been from classical pieces – mostly from sacred oratorios such as Handel's "Messiah" with its wonderful "Hallelujah Chorus," Haydn's "Creation," Mendelssohn's "Elijah" and that kind of thing.

But one morning a few months ago during the period when I was praying about what to speak on for this year's Feast of Tabernacles, I was listening, as I often do at breakfast, to CBC-FM radio, our Canadian national arts radio station. Most of the music played on CBC-FM is classical music. Occasionally they'll play some jazz or world music, usually during the evening or night-time hours. But what they very, very rarely play is country and bluegrass music!

So, imagine my surprise that morning to hear the pretty voice of the well-known country and bluegrass star, Alison Krauss. And when I heard the lyrics to the song she was singing, I was fascinated by them. Here are those lyrics:

**When He cometh to take up His jewels
All His jewels, precious jewels...
His loved and His own**

**Like the stars of the morning
His bright crown adorning
They will shine in their beauty
Bright gems for His crown**

**He will gather the gems for His kingdom
All the pure ones, all the bright ones
His loved and His own**

**Little children who love their Redeemer
All the jewels, precious jewels
His loved and His own...
Bright gems for his crown**

The song is called "Jewels" and, as I later discovered from the CD sleeve notes, it was written by William O. Cushing and George Root. I thought that I might do a search for these two composers on the Internet and perhaps e-mail one or both of them to ask what scriptures they used for their lovely song. But my Internet research quickly showed me that Mr. Root died in 1896 and Mr. Cushing followed him in 1902! So, as both composers died over a hundred years ago, the e-mail method was out, and I had to dig a little more by myself. The lyrics appear to have been taken from three (perhaps more) familiar scriptures: Malachi 3:17, Matthew 24:31, and Zechariah 9:16, all of which we'll come to as we proceed.

The purpose of this article is to show how precious and valuable God's people are to Him – more precious than even the world's most expensive jewels!

The value of precious jewels

When we think of precious stones, we tend to think of the well known ones such as diamonds, sapphires, rubies and emeralds. But there are many other kinds, the value of which seems to have changed through the years.

I am not an expert on jewels, gemmology (the science of gems) or lapidary (the art of cutting, polishing, and engraving precious stones). But the late Fred Weir, one of our Victoria church members who died last November, was something of an expert. Lapidary was one of the many hobbies Fred pursued during his long life. In his will which I was the executor of, Fred left his son fourteen lovely jewels called Asteriated Almandite, which are black, shiny stones with a tinge of red. I had never heard of these gems, but we discovered that each one was worth about a thousand dollars.

Although a thousand dollars may be a lot of money to most of us, it is pocket change in the world of precious stones! The Guinness Book of World Records states that the most valuable jewel ever sold at auction was a flawless, 100.1-carat, pear-shaped diamond which was sold on May 17, 1995 for 19,858,500 Swiss francs (approximately \$16,548,750 in U.S. currency) at Sotheby's in Switzerland.

Priceless gems

But there are other gems that are even more valuable – jewels that will never go to auction and are considered to be virtually priceless. The famous Hope Diamond, which was part of the French crown jewels and was owned by kings Louis XIV, XV and XIV and Marie Antoinette, is now in the Smithsonian Institute. It weighs 45.52 carats and was cut from an original, unprocessed stone found in India that was over 112 carats.

When we think of priceless precious stones, our thoughts must sooner or later turn to the fabulous British Crown Jewels. Although their intrinsic value has been estimated at over one hundred million U.S. dollars, their historical value makes them priceless. Just take one piece as an example. The Imperial Crown of India contains 6,170 diamonds, four sapphires, rubies and six emeralds which gemmology experts describe as "remarkably fine." One of these magnificent emeralds weighs 34 carats.

But there are other stones yet more precious than these!

Jewels for God's tabernacle

When God was planning His portable dwelling, He gave some special inspiration and talent to a man by the name of Bezalel to look after the preparation of the jewels and their settings which were to adorn the tabernacle:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship. (Exodus 31:1-5)

It appears that God attached quite a lot of importance to this special lapidary work for His tabernacle – a surprising amount of importance for a physical work – because we see that He had Moses repeat this information over again:

And Moses said to the children of Israel, "See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom and understanding, in knowledge and all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of artistic workmanship. (Exodus 35:30-33)

We can imagine that these precious stones and their settings were amongst the most beautiful the world has ever seen. One item that God planned for the tabernacle and for His Aaronic priesthood was the visually stunning Breastplate of Judgment:

You shall make the breastplate of judgment. Artistically woven according to the workmanship of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, you shall make it. It shall be doubled into a square [KJV: Foursquare it shall be being doubled]: a span shall be its length, and a span shall be its width. And you shall put settings of stones in it, four rows of stones: the first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and an emerald; this shall be the first row; the second row shall be a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond; the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; and the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be set in gold settings. And the stones shall have the names of the sons of Israel, twelve according to their names, like the engravings of a signet, each one with its own name; they shall be according to the twelve tribes. (Exodus 28:15-21)

Please note that the bejewelled breastplate was made foursquare, as this will come up again. Many of the jewel types we read of in the Bible are unfamiliar to most modern readers. Some of them are considered today to be merely semi-precious. But you can be sure that if God looked upon them as valuable and precious, then they certainly were.

How precious are God's children to Him?

The lyrics to Alison Krauss' song suggest to us that God's children are, symbolically, His precious jewels and, as we shall see, this is very true. But just *how* precious are we to God? Jesus tells us that God the Father loves all His children to the same degree as He loves His Firstborn:

I in them, and you in me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that you have sent me, and have loved them as you have loved me. (John 17:23)

This amazing fact is so hard for us to believe. Nevertheless, it is true. God the Father also had great love for His Son's "first wife" to whom He had given the symbolic pet name, "Jerusalem," and who was made up of His Old Testament children – the children of Israel. See how He and His Son lavished riches upon His first daughter-in-law:

Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations, and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: "Your birth and your nativity are from the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite... I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through my splendor which I had bestowed on you," says the Lord GOD. (Ezekiel 16:1-3; 10-14)

But Jesus' first wife became vain, and her conduct became worse than that of the filthiest harlot. She grievously misused the precious jewels which her faithful Husband had given her. She used some of them in the construction of disgusting objects and heathen idols. The remainder were stolen by her illicit lovers:

But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it. You took some of your garments and adorned multicolored high places for yourself, and played the harlot on them. Such things should not happen, nor be. You have also taken your beautiful jewelry from my gold and my silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images and played the harlot with them... I will also give you into their hand, and they shall throw down your shrines and break down your high places. They shall also strip you of your clothes, take your beautiful jewelry, and leave you naked and bare. (Ezekiel 16:15-17; 39)

God the Father and Jesus Christ, in their great mercy, gave her every opportunity for repentance. But to no avail. She continued in her harlotry:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" (Luke 13:34-35)

A divorce became necessary, and the marriage was completely ended by Jesus' death. The church of God became His second "Fiancée" and she now waits – as His future wife and thus as the future second daughter-in-law of God the Father – for their wedding day:

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isaiah 61:10)

Again God will give her the symbolic pet name of "Jerusalem" and again He will bedeck her with priceless jewels:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." (Revelation 21:9)

The angel promised to show the Bride of Christ to John. But what did he then show him?

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. (Verse 10-11)

The angel showed John "the great city, the holy Jerusalem." The Bride of Christ and this great and holy city, then, are one and the same. Also, this verse begins to reveal that Christ's Bride is not just bejewelled. The Bride *is* the jewels!

The city is laid out as a square [KJV: lieth foursquare]; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. (Verse 16)

Notice that the holy city is made foursquare, just like the bejewelled breastplate of the tabernacle described earlier.

And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. (Verse 18)

The huge wall of the holy city will be constructed – not of inferior, concrete, brick or rough stone – but of the highest quality jasper, strikingly beautiful, and custom-created for the purpose. The city itself will be constructed of gold so pure that it will be as transparent as glass!

And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; (Verse 19)

When we read this verse carefully, we might find its grammar a little difficult and somewhat confusing. Will the foundations of the city wall be merely *garnished* with gems? Or will each of the twelve foundations be *totally constructed* of huge examples of these precious stones, the like of which no human eye has ever seen? This sounds impossible. But it is no more impossible than the existence of pearls that are big enough to be gates, as we will come to see! Surely precious stones of such a vast size do not exist, do they? Not on earth today, perhaps! But we must not forget what verse 10 told us – that this holy city will descend from God and will be (if it has not already been) constructed by the Creator and His special building team in Heaven!

Even though this is God's second example of this type (the first having been the Old Testament Bride of Christ, also named "Jerusalem"), it is difficult for us to associate the symbol of a pure and beautiful bride with that of a vast city and kingdom. But this is the symbolism God has inspired and, if we will take the time to consider that the walls of the holy city are constructed from the most beautiful jewels in the universe, that the bejewelled Bride of Christ is the daughter-in-law of God the Father and is collectively made up of His children, and that the children of God are His jewels and are the stones of His temple (I Peter 2:4-8), then we will come to understand that the twin symbols fit together so very, very well. Continuing...

The fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. (Verse 20-21)

Can you imagine pearls the size of vast city gates? One observer commented, "If the pearls are so huge, imagine the size of the oysters that will produce them!"

Notice that some of these stones – perhaps all of them if we allow for a difference in terminology between the Greek of Revelation and the Hebrew of Exodus – were also used in the High Priest's breastplate of judgment. It seems that the breastplate of judgement may have been intended as a small, physical symbol of the Bride of Christ, of the great, holy city of the New Jerusalem, which will descend out of heaven from God, of the church, and of the Kingdom of God itself.

Like the stones in the breastplate of judgment, some of the stones of the holy city – the pearl, the sapphire, the emerald and the amethyst – are somewhat familiar to us and are considered in today's world to be precious. The others are less familiar to most and are usually considered, at best, to be semi-precious. But the comparatively poor specimens of jasper, chalcedony, sardonyx, sardius, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase and jacinth that we have access to today are as nothing compared to the quality of the stones that God will create and choose especially for His special use.

Not only will Christ adorn His Bride with the most priceless jewels. Let us now return to the amazing and encouraging fact that He and His Father consider those who make up the Bride of Christ to actually *be* their most prized and precious jewels:

"They shall be mine," says the LORD of hosts, "on the day that I make them my jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him." (Malachi 3:17)

What are these jewels? The Hebrew word used by Malachi is "segullah" which can, as well as "jewels," be translated as:

- Wealth,
- Closely shut up and protected,
- Peculiar or particular treasure,
- Special,
- Treasured possession,
- Valued property.

And who is Malachi referring to here? Just who is it who will have the honour of being counted among the precious jewels of God? Verse 17 implies that this distinction is given to God's children – to His Son and, by extension (John 17:23), to His Son's siblings – those who are willing to serve Him. This factor of service to God is repeated in verse 18:

Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him. (Verse 18)

How else can God's jewels be identified?

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. (Verse 16)

The Jewels of God are those who meditate on His name and who have a proper fear of Him. Why do we attend the Feast of Tabernacles each year? Is it not to repeatedly learn to properly fear our great God (Deuteronomy 14:23; 31:10-13)?

God's jewels, then, are those who are righteous, who serve Him, who meditate on His name, and who fear Him. They are the elect whom "He will gather... when He cometh" (as our opening song lyrics say) at the end of this age:

And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matthew 24:31)

God inspired the prophet Zechariah to write a parallel scripture to Malachi 3:16-18:

The LORD their God will save them in that day, as the flock of His people. For they shall be like the jewels of a crown, lifted like a banner over His land. (Zechariah 9:16)

Instead of Malachi's word "segullah," Zechariah used the Hebrew word "eben," translated into English as "jewels" (KJV: stones). This word accentuates the practical applications of precious stones rather than just their ornamental beauty. Most of us look upon jewels merely as high quality, expensive ornaments. But many jewels can be useful as well as well as just being ornamentally beautiful. Gold, Diamonds, chrysolite and other precious metals and minerals are used in various manufacturing and electronic processes.

Zechariah's Hebrew word for "crown" is "nezer," which can also mean:

- Chaplet or Wreath (especially of royalty),
- Earring,
- Stones of a crown or diadem

In addition, this word "nezer" accentuates something set apart, dedicated (as of a king, priest, high priest or Nazarite), separated, and consecrated. In order to be included in the jewels of God, therefore, we must be willing to be set apart, dedicated, separated and consecrated.

Zechariah's interesting term, "lifted like a banner" comes from the Hebrew word "nacac" which means:

- To be conspicuous as a signal,
- To gleam from afar.

This fits in so well with God's instructions that His jewels must shine His light to the world (Philippians 2:15).

How precious are the things of God to us?

Finally, let us turn things around a little. We have asked what is most precious to God, and we have exulted in the fact that we can, if we endure to the end, be counted amongst God's most precious jewels.

But what is most precious to *us*? Are the things that are most precious to God also the things that are most precious to us? What about His children – our brothers and sisters in His church? Do we think of them as our fellow jewels? The apostle Paul wrote that he considered his brethren – specifically those in Philippi and Thessalonica – to constitute his very own crown:

Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved. (Philippians 4:1)

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? (I Thessalonians 2:19)

What about our physical children? Do they rank among our most precious jewels? They should. God has given us His pattern. His children are most precious to Him. Ours should be very precious to us.

Do we look at our children as being of much more value than any of our physical possessions, even including any valuable jewellery we might own – or might like to own? Whether useful or ornamental, our physical possessions are just things. Just stuff! And as Christians, we need to be careful not to attach too much value to physical stuff:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matthew 13:44-46)

In these two brief parables – so short and to the point – Jesus intimates that, rather than lusting after physical jewellery, we should be searching for God's jewels, God's pearls, God's treasure. Back in chapter 6, Jesus is more straightforward. Here, He does not merely hint, He commands:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)

Where is *your* treasure? *What* is your treasure? Is your treasure the same as God's treasure? And where is the real treasure? Even though Moses had been brought up as a prince of Egypt, he came to know where the real treasure was to be found:

Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. (Hebrews 11:26)

There may have been times when the reproach of Christ may not have seemed too much like treasure to Moses, but he knew that the real recompence and the real reward both lay ahead, in the future.

Again, where can we find the real treasure? Where should we be looking for the true riches? God gives us the answers through the apostle Paul:

That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Colossians 2:2-3)

The real riches and treasure are true understanding, wisdom and knowledge. They are hidden for safekeeping in God the Father and in Jesus Christ. That is where we must go to seek them. Does it not make good sense that, if God has and is the true Treasure, He would consider His children – His offspring – to be His jewels? To coin an old saying, but with every honour and respect to God our Father, His beloved children are chips – precious chips – off the Old Block!

Earlier, we mentioned the staggeringly valuable Imperial Crown of India with its 6,170 precious stones. But you and I are promised incorruptible crowns of glory, life and righteousness, the value of which will pale all of the corruptible British Crown Jewels into insignificance:

And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. (I Peter 5:4)

Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (II Timothy 4:8)

Peter, Paul, James and John were all aware that fabulous, bejewelled, incorruptible crowns are already assigned to God's beloved children. However, our Elder Brother gives us a stern warning that we must do our part to hold on to those crowns:

Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. (Revelation 3:11)

What is our part? What must we do, individually, in order to ensure that we receive our crowns?

And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. (I Corinthians 9:25 KJV)

Two of our action items are that we must strive for the mastery and we must be temperate in all things. But there is more:

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (James 1:12)

James tells us that we must love God and we must endure temptations and trials. His brother, John, adds that we must fearlessly face imprisonment, other sufferings, testing and tribulation, and that we must be faithful even, if necessary, to the very point of death:

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Revelation 2:10)

"I will give you the crown of life." What a wonderful, wonderful promise! How very precious God's children are to Him – infinitely more precious than even the world's most valuable crowns, treasures, riches and jewels.

*John Plunkett
Building Bridges, The Church of God - Canada
Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, Canada*