

THE MATCHLESS PEARL



The author of this story is unknown, so we have no way of knowing if it actually occurred. However, it is still a vivid illustration of a truth that can sometimes be hard to grasp.

Years ago, while an American named David Morse was living and working in India, he met and became friends with a pearl diver, Rambhau.

Morse spent many evenings in Rambhau's cabin, reading to him from the Bible and explaining its central theme: God's love and salvation in Jesus. Rambhau enjoyed listening to the Word of God, but whenever Morse would encourage Rambhau to accept Christ as his Savior, Rambhau would shake his head and reply, "Your Christian way to Heaven is too easy for me! I cannot accept it. If ever I should find admittance to Heaven in that manner, I would feel like a pauper

there—like a beggar who has been let in out of pity. I may be proud, but I want to deserve my place in Heaven. I want to earn it, and so I am going to work for it."

Nothing that Morse could say seemed to have any effect on Rambhau's decision. Years passed.

Then one evening Morse heard a knock on his door. It was Rambhau.

"Come in, dear friend," said Morse.

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

"Of course I'll come," replied Morse.

As they neared his cabin, Rambhau said, "In a week's time I will start working for my place in Heaven. I am leaving for Delhi, and I am crawling there on my knees."

"That's crazy!" Morse exclaimed. "It's nine hundred miles to Delhi.

The skin will break on your knees, and you will have blood poisoning before you get there—if you ever get there!"

"No, I must get to Delhi," affirmed Rambhau, "and the immortals will reward me for it! The suffering will be sweet, for it will purchase Heaven for me!"

"Rambhau, my friend, you can't. How can I let you do that, when Jesus Christ has already suffered and died to purchase Heaven for you?"

But the old man could not be moved. "You are my dearest friend on earth. Through all these years you have stood by me in sickness, in want. Sometimes you have been my only friend. But even you cannot turn me from my desire to purchase eternal bliss. I must go to Delhi!"

Inside the cabin, Morse was seated in a chair Rambhau had

built for him shortly after he came to India—the same chair Morse had sat in on so many occasions while he had read the Bible to his friend. Rambhau left the room to return soon with a small but heavy strongbox.

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

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

"No, I couldn't." Even as he spoke, the diver's eyes filled with tears. "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 ever dived for pearls. What joy he brought to me!

“As you know,” Rambhau went on, “most pearls have some defect or blemish that only an expert can discern, but my boy always dreamed of finding the perfect pearl—one finer than all that had ever been found before. One day he found it! But in gathering it, he stayed under water too long. He died soon after. That pearl cost him his life.”

The old pearl diver bowed his head. For a moment his whole body shook, but there was no sound. “All these years,” he continued, “I have kept this pearl. Now I am going and may not return, so 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 parting the cotton packing, he picked up a mammoth pearl and placed it in Morse’s hand.

It was one of the largest pearls ever found off the coast of India, and glowed with a luster never seen in cultured pearls. It would have brought a fabulous sum in any market.

For a moment Morse gazed with awe and was speechless. Then he exclaimed, “Rambhau! What a pearl!”

“That pearl, my friend, is perfect,” replied the Indian quietly.

Then Morse was struck with a new thought: This was the very opportunity and occasion he had prayed for to help Rambhau understand the value of Jesus’ sacrifice.

“Rambhau,” he said, “this is a wonderful pearl—an amazing pearl! Let me buy it. I would give you ten thousand dollars for it.”

“What? What do you mean?” Rambhau asked.

“I will give you *fifteen* thousand dollars for it—or if it takes more, I will work for it.”

Rambhau stiffened his whole body. “This pearl is beyond 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 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, my friend. 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 lifeblood of my son. I cannot sell this, but I can give it to you. Just accept it in token of the love I have for you.”

Morse 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? My words are just what you have been saying to God all the time.”

The diver looked long and searchingly at Morse. Slowly he began to understand.

“God is offering you salvation as a free gift,” Morse said. “It is so great and priceless that no man on earth can buy it. Millions of dollars are too little. No man on earth could earn it. If he were to work for it all his life, his life would be millions of years too short. No man is good enough to deserve it. It

cost God the lifeblood of His only Son to gain entrance for you into Heaven. In a million years, in a hundred pilgrimages, you could not earn that entrance. All you can do is 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 Son to offer it to you?”

Tears rolled down the old man’s cheeks. The veil that had clouded his understanding was beginning to lift. “I see it now. I could not believe that salvation was free. Now I understand. Some things are too priceless to be bought or earned. I will accept His salvation, my friend!”

How very, very rich [God’s] kindness is, as shown in all He has done for us through Jesus Christ.

Because of His kindness, you have been saved through trusting Christ. And even trusting is not of yourselves; it too is a gift from God.

Salvation is not a reward for the good we have done, so none of us can take any credit for it.

It is God Himself who has made us what we are and given us new lives [through] Christ Jesus; and long ages ago He planned that we should spend these lives in helping others.

—*The Bible*, Ephesians 2:7–10 TLB.