

Looking for Jewels Proverbs 31:10-27 ZCC 5/12/13 (Mother's Day)

*10 *Who can find a worthy woman? For her price is far above rubies. 11 The heart of her husband trusts in her. He shall have no lack of gain. 12 She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. 13 She seeks wool and flax, and works eagerly with her hands. 14 She is like the merchant ships. She brings her bread from afar. 15 She rises also while it is yet night, gives food to her household, and portions for her servant girls. 16 She considers a field, and buys it. With the fruit of her hands, she plants a vineyard. 17 She arms her waist with strength, and makes her arms strong. 18 She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp doesn't go out by night. 19 She lays her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. 20 She opens her arms to the poor; yes, she extends her hands to the needy. 21 She is not afraid of the snow for her household; for all her household are clothed with scarlet. 22 She makes for herself carpets of tapestry. Her clothing is fine linen and purple. 23 Her husband is respected in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land. 24 She makes linen garments and sells them, and delivers sashes to the merchant. 25 Strength and dignity are her clothing. She laughs at the time to come. 26 She opens her mouth with wisdom. Faithful instruction is on her tongue. 27 She looks well to the ways of her household, and doesn't eat the bread of idleness. (World English Bible)*

Vonna and I grew up in Arkansas. Like West Virginia and maybe Mississippi--our home state is often the butt of jokes about a lot of things--but most often about being ignorant hillbillies. For instance, a teacher from Springdale, Arkansas supposedly submitted some answers from a test she gave. "Q: Name the four seasons. A: salt, pepper, mustard, and Ketchup." "Q: How is dew formed? A: The sun shines on the leaves of a plant and causes them to perspire."

Now that I got the jokes out of the way--let me brag a little bit. There is something in Arkansas that you won't find anywhere else in the United States. Do you know what that is--or can you guess?

Arkansas has the only diamond mine in the United States. Not only that, but it is a publicly-owned park and for a small fee, anyone can go in and dig for diamonds. The largest one ever found was over 40 carats but every year or two someone will find one that is three or four carats. They even have experts at the park to help you identify what you found. I've actually never been but they tell me that the best time to go is after a rain.

I'm wondering. Why would anyone go? You go there and you give them your hard earned money and then you go out into the wet ground and dig around--probably getting filthy in the process. And I can tell you that after a good rain in Arkansas it gets hot when the sun comes out--the humidity and the heat will nearly smother you. Why would anyone endure that?

Because diamonds are very valuable, that's why. It is possible that you could find a diamond worth a million dollars or even more than that! Like I said, fairly large diamonds are found pretty often--diamonds worth 10 or 20 thousand dollars or more. It may be a small chance, but there IS a chance that you could get a substantial return on your time, money, and effort. No one would be out there if diamonds weren't valuable, would they?

We read it earlier, but let me re-read our passage for today. I suspect that this scripture passage is being read and re-read all over the country this morning--this Mother's Day. Some say that it is a description of an ideal woman.

Let's go back and read Proverbs 31:10-31 again--and I encourage you to read along as well as keep your bible open because we will look back through once again--when I will pull some basic thoughts out of the passage in order. Watch for them.

First of all, let me point out something. This passage is intended to be descriptive, not prescriptive. This passage describes an ideal woman for the time of Solomon. The specific characteristics might or might not apply to different cultures and different times and places. Certainly I don't believe that someone necessarily needs to have all these characteristics to be a good wife or mother today. In fact, I am not going to talk about specific details most of all--I am going to mention the basics and then we will go back to verse 10.

Notice as I go through in order that there are some basics that are still of great value today. I think that is one of the reasons the writer describes this woman as being more valuable than jewels--because these personal traits are ALWAYS honored and ALWAYS valued--just as pearls and jewels and gold and silver are.

1. She is trustworthy. She knows what is important in life and she sticks to her personal values. She is not swayed by the winds of cultural change. She has a set of personal boundaries and doesn't cross them.
2. She seeks good for others.
3. She is not afraid of work and is willing to do what is needed. Verse 14 says that she brings in food from afar off--I guess that means she is willing to drive all the way to Ashland if needs be.
4. Verse 15 shows us that she is willing to give of herself to others.
5. She is a business woman--a smart cookie--and she knows it.
6. As we go along we see again that she is not lazy--she desires to work.
7. She is also generous.
8. She provides for her family as she is able.
9. In verse 23 it seems that we might even connect her husband's success in some way to who she is and what she is.
10. Once again, it is mentioned that she is a business woman who helps keep her family solvent.
11. She teaches her values to others--through her words and her example.
12. Then we see that she should be rewarded by praise from her family--she is praiseworthy.
13. Notice in verse 30 we see another virtue--fearing the LORD. This fear, of course, means awe and love not being afraid.

As I said, customs come and go and circumstances and cultures change. No longer today are women expected to walk behind their husbands. No longer are women expected to cover their faces in public. No longer are they expected to keep silent in public or even in church. Still we value certain things today--self-denial for the sake of others and being willing to work hard and being generous and being trustworthy. Those characteristics are respected across most cultures and in most places.

OK--I said we would go back to verse 10. Look at it. Such a mother or wife or woman that we have described--just read about in scripture--is more valuable than jewels. Some translations name rubies specifically but some don't. What it seems to mean is that they are more valuable than the finest or best or biggest jewel you can find.

Why would we consider going to that diamond mine in Arkansas even though it was hot and muddy and dirty? Because we know how valuable diamonds are.

If we decided to go--all of us or some of us--what would we do if we found one? Knowing my luck, I'd probably find one and not recognize it and throw it back--but what if I did find one and DID recognize it? What would I do? I'm pretty sure I would announce it.

"LOOK WHAT I FOUND!!!" And then I would probably make up an "I found it!" dance right there on the spot. [Goofy dance called for here :)] Then I'd get on my cell phone and call some people--and then maybe I'd take some pictures and put them on FaceBook.

When I got home, I'd get it cleaned up and I'd send it to an expert to see if it should be cut and how it should be cut--to minimize the flaws and then I would think about what kind of setting it should go in so that it would be the most impressive--and then I'd show it off.

The intent of this sermon, if you haven't figured it out yet, is NOT to tell women how to be good wives and mothers and great all-round women in our world. This sermon is about verse 10. Your mother and your wife and your grandmother are to be treated as the jewels they are. Just like that diamond we found, she may have a flaw or two but that doesn't keep her from being a jewel just the same.

How do we treat these jewels?

14. Know their value. Know how important they are in your life--or how important they were in your life. If you have never taken the time to take stock of that, now is a perfect time to do so.
15. Do NOT become the gem-cutter. God himself will shape a virtuous woman. It is HIS job and not yours or mine. I promise that if we forget that fact, we will create plenty of trouble.
16. Seek to put your jewel in the best possible setting. To the best of your ability, take care of your jewel. Jewels deserve to be in the nicest place and the nicest setting possible.
17. Allow them to be the jewel GOD intended for them to be. Yours may be a diamond or maybe a pearl or maybe a ruby or even an emerald. There are many ways to have those virtues we talked about and many ways to show them. God honors our individual efforts and talents and abilities.
18. Remember the "I found it" dance I mentioned? Remember that I'd call and take pictures and tell others what I had found? If you have a jewel, you should be showing it off. I wouldn't point out the piece of carbon in my diamond would I? Today is the day we show off our jewels and honor them for being the beautiful and unique treasure that they are.

You may be thinking that we are a bit short today--we may get out a little early. If so, take that extra time to honor your mother or your wife or your grandmother--in person or in memory. Each one is a jewel given straight from the hand of God.