# Jemma Jayne’s Gems

JJ’s Gems focuses on gemstones. While gems aren’t a basic learning staple for children like the previous colors, numbers, directions, and letters, I had to go with them since the name “Jemma” brings it to mind. This set of poems attempts to cover the Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5-7. Each gem covers one or two sections of the sermon, sometimes very closely, and sometimes more broadly. The poems are ordered in a manner which follows Matthew 5-7. References to what I envision each poem to represent are placed in the footnotes. I wanted to focus on the Sermon on the Mount because it has been extremely influential to me over the past three years, as I have begun to take Jesus’s words more seriously.

Jesus’s words in Matthew 5-7 are very hard, as he guides believers to understand what Kingdom living looks like. I hope that through these poems I can internalize Christ’s words more, and I can expound on what Jesus is saying in his sermon – not in a sense of adding to his sermon, but consolidating other ideas from scripture with it. While there are a number of individual poems and sets of poems I like a lot better than these in terms of how they sound, I have to say that JJ’s Gems is by far the deepest, and is jam packed with double and triple entendres, allusions, etc. For this reason, I highly recommend reading the footnotes for these poems.

As far as deeper significance goes, I have also structured this set of poems to number 12. I did this because there are two important sets of gems in the Bible, one set contained on the priest’s breastplate, and one constituting the foundations of the New Jerusalem – the redeemed holy city on earth. Both sets contain a different set of gems, with some overlapping, and both sets contain 12 precious gems. While I did not go with either set of gems, as they differ and there is overlap now that we have more thorough classifications, nevertheless, the number refers to these biblical ideas.

## \*Onyx

Words our minds hear are often left unsaid

Enlightened thoughts only see light of night

Divorced from ideal, to cynic wed

Our grounded beings never taking flight

In painful world most seek only pleasure

Juxtaposed lives, like black and white onyx

Living subjectively in great measure

Those who seek to find life in cryonics

But facing life means not avoiding pain

As we defend the clean from the besmirched

To courage we retreat from the inane

To battle fallen demons who are perched

Christ's illocution is not vacuous

The cross is and is not precipitous

 [Mt. 5:1-12 and Mt. 7:13-29] Onyx has a number of variations, but the one which I refer to here is the black and white style onyx. It was difficult to get a common theme for its use in mythology, but it seemed that a quelling of fear and pain were common. It was thought to give courage in Rome (or take away fear of death and injury), give eloquence in Europe (or take away fear of being humiliated), and taking away or dampening pain in childbirth as well as quell sexual lust. It was also thought to be able to contain evil spirits. In all of these senses, onyx seems to be a depressive sort of material towards particular emotions and entities.

Here I thought back to my poem “The Unspoken” (see Appendix 8). Most of the things we hear in our head throughout the day are left unsaid. While this may sometimes be good, there are many lovely thoughts we have which never see the light of day – only the dark of night - because we are too timid to share them with others.

In our embracing of the fallen world as it is, rather than the ideal that it should be (and will be as God restores it), we refuse to live as God intends for us to live. A Christian realist may understand that an ideal will never be realized until Christ’s return, at least in terms of the effects. However, they understand that God calls us to live as idealists, with faith and reliance on him for the means.

We are most averse to the sensation of pain and are highly tuned into the presence of pain in our world. We seek to distance ourselves from this as much as possible. Our aversion to pain and attraction to pleasure means that even if something is good, but painful, we will avoid it (e.g. exercise, the way of God, healthy food), and if something feels good, but is harmful, we will indulge (e.g. alcohol, nicotine, drugs, junk food, etc).

People seek the perpetuation of pleasure so much that they attempt to become immortal. One way modern humans try to do this is through cryonics (not to be confused with cryogenics, which is the science of studying cold temperatures). Cryonics seeks to freeze human bodies and then resurrect them when their lives can be healed so they live longer. In fact, as molecules approach colder and colder temperatures, nearing Absolute 0, they move less and less until they completely stop. In this great irony, individuals prematurely embrace death, “living” as a frozen corpse for who knows how long. While this may subjectively be what some individuals call “living,” it doesn’t seem like living to me. It’s empty. Seek and find are also intended to allude to the real way we’re supposed to seek and find in Matthew 5-7.

But true life isn’t the avoidance of pain. Rather, it’s the promotion and upholding of that which is clean and good, defending what is true, real, and ideal from that which defiles and corrupts. Even if it means pain for me, upholding what is good is what gives meaning to life. That to which we adhere and obey shows where our hope and love lie. If we lose the fabric of objective good, we lose everything, because we lose the source of objective good with it.

This references two of the myths of onyx (courage and trapping demons). As we fight for the holy and good, we move away from all that is inane, and we fight our battle not against flesh and blood, but against the demonic. These devils prey on us as they perpetuate their false dichotomy of pleasure and pain (similar to Lewis’s demonic dichotomy in the “Great Divorce), and we must fight them.

Jesus had three illocutions to which I’m referring (a promise, a command, and a warning). First, he commands believers. He commands us to follow him, to take up our crosses, etc. Second, he warns us of how serious it is to deny him. If we deny him, he will deny us. Finally, he promises that those who follow him and seek his Kingdom will be provided for and receive eternal rewards.

Taking up our cross and following Jesus can be precipitous in two ways. First, it is a very steep and dangerous path, filled with hardship and pain. While the world’s view is that such a path should be avoided, we must climb it to victory. Second, the way of the cross is often precipitous in that there are many dangers. There are many goats on the path, heading for judgment. The path to destruction is wide and many choose that path. In this sense, many who choose to say they follow Christ are nominal. They make a precipitous – not well thought out and damning – commitment and end up falling off the precipitous heights.

To mimic the juxtaposition seen visually in onyx, I created a verbal juxtaposition in each line. Every line has at least two words which have opposing meanings, images, or ideas associated with them. 1) hears/unsaid, 2) enlightened/light/night, 3) divorced/wed, 4) grounded/flight, 5) painful/pleasure, 6) black/white, 7) subjectively/measure, 8) seek/find, 9) facing/avoiding, 10) clean/besmirched, 11) courage/retreat, 12) fallen/perched, 13) illocution/vacuous, 14) is/is not

## \*Amber

Desert browns, palette formed where there's no rain

A sign of lifelessness and compromise

Same for those amidst amber waves - the grain

Where life and living are dichotomized

But God made us, when we're rubbed up against

To polarize ourselves in shocking ways

Not to build and electrify a fence

But attract opposites with our displays

So build your city high upon a hill

A Kingdom outpost, not a nation-state

For true citizenship can't be distilled

As salt's no longer salt without its taste

Flavor and brightness should draw others in

But only works if we're God's citizens

[Mt. 5:13-16 and Mt. 6:24]. Amber is a brownish stone which has long been recognized for its ability to become charged and exhibit the properties of static electricity. I use both of these properties throughout the poem.

The endless brown of the desert depicts a wasteland of life. Without vegetation there is no visible life, but only that which cowers away hiding from the elements for the majority of the day. That which does live in the desert must compromise with its environment. Whereas a deer living in a temperate climate, like in Florida, can gather food all year long and come out and enjoy its surroundings year round, night or day – those in the desert are wholly shaped by their environment. While the various adaptations may look different, each animal is specifically adapted for their extreme environment. They are formed by the desert.

I change environments here from the desert to the United States. The first line here is supposed to allude to the “amber waves of grain” line in the song “God Bless America.” I’m talking about those who live in the land of these amber waves of grain (the USA). Whereas the song references this as a beautiful thing, the idea of amber should connect back to the brown referenced earlier, which depicts lifelessness and desert. I also change the words from “of grain” to “the grain” because I also want to ensure that the ones I’m speaking of here are those who not only live in the USA, but rather those who live there and live with or go with the grain. I am not therefore necessarily speaking badly of the USA, but rather those who, like the desert animals, are shaped by the vacuous culture around them. I simply use the States because that’s my frame of reference. While conformers to culture may technically be alive, and while their adaptations and compromises may help to sustain their life, in some senses we could argue that they aren’t truly living. They don’t live a fulfilled life. Like animals in the desert who are bound to their environment and aren’t truly free, so are those who live in a culturally compromised position and go along with Babylon. This could be said of any culture.

When amber is rubbed on the right material, the atoms polarize in their alignment which creates static electricity. Children of God, when confronted with or rubbed up against by culture are to do the same. We are not to conform, but are rather to be polarized and distinguished from it.

When I argue that we should be polarized, I don’t mean that in a pejorative or escapist sense. We aren’t to cause conflict and remove ourselves from the world. Rather, our polarization – how uniquely and beautifully we are set apart – should be something those living in the desert of Babylon are attracted to. Our polarization is not something meant to distance ourselves, but something that is meant to draw others in. We don’t use our religious standards to build electric fences around God and community, keeping others out. In this sense, “a fence” is meant to also mean “offense.” Rather we use our electrical powers to stimulate and pull others towards us.

This is a specific reference to Matthew 5 and the idea of a city on a hill. We are not primarily members of Babylon – our individual country or nation-state. We are citizens of the Kingdom. The city we build is not a city in or for our humanly created nation, but for our heavenly nation. Our citizenship is in haven and as Christ makes the nations his footstool, we are to be the outposts of that Kingdom that are beginning to convert human citizenship into heavenly citizenship.

This citizenship of heaven isn’t dual citizenship. We aren’t equally citizens of two places. We are primarily citizens of heaven. There can be no compromise (see I Peter for a great look at this). While we submit to rulers in our nation-states, we only obey and follow the Kingdom. To distill our allegiance at all to the Kingdom is to cause our saltiness to lose it’s flavor (another Matthew 5 allusion). If we attempt to distill our citizenship – to separate the salt of the Kingdom from the water of this world, you end up with two separate products, only one of which has saltiness. The Kingdom is all or nothing. We cannot serve two masters. If we are members of the Kingdom, we are to be salt in this world, but our identity is not dichotomous. We are not of this world – we are not water. We are only salt. As Peter says, we are aliens in this world.

To be a bright city or tasty salt is only possible if we recognize our true and only citizenship. We can’t draw others to God by being a “Christian nation.” We draw others in by living the Kingdom and drawing them into that and refusing to be any nation other than Christ’s nation. The nations in which we live are accidental properties (philosophically meaning properties which are “not necessary”) which matter very little and have no ultimate meaning for who we are or who we are to be.

## \*Turquoise

In past fire rained down from the heavens

God's judgment administered to the damned

Coals of fire only way to God's presence

To law, judgment, and pain God didst remand

But no asceticism like Tolstoy's

Could ever protect or deliver us

And even totem of heavn'ly turquoise

Becomes debased as sin effloresces

Where then can we look for our pirouzeh?

We look to him whose eyes are flaming fire

And patiently await Parousia

When Son of Man exacts all that's required

With confident boldness we now then pray

Seeking God's Kingdom come until The Day

[Mt. 5:17-20 and Mt. 6:5-15]. In the Old Testament we read about God’s extreme holiness. We see a number of instances of fire raining down from heaven in judgment. Even for God’s people, his holiness was extreme. We see in Isaiah that God placed a burning coal on his lips to purify him. The old vision of God was one of a consuming fire. Apart from the cases of God’s judgment, as in Sodom and Gomorrah, or those directly entering God’s presence, like Isaiah, we also see images of the coals (or the fire) of animal sacrifice the Israelites went through in order to purify themselves before a holy God.

In Galatians 3 Paul says, “**23**Before the coming of this faith,[[j](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians+3&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29126j)] we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. **24**So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. **25**Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.” This old system is what guided us, though imperfectly, until a new system was established.

Leo Tolstoy was an advocate of extreme asceticism. The law tended to drive people to a similar sort of path as seen in the asceticism of the Pharisses in Jesus’s day. But such a system doesn’t work.

Turquoise supposedly protected its wearer. A sign of impending danger was that the color of the turquoise would change. Turquoise was often a religious totem viewed as imparting protection.

There’s a lot going on here. 1) The straightforward meaning is that whatever heavenly protection one thought they gained through their totem, sin is a corrupting force present in all of us. Sin is contrary to that which is from heaven. 2) “Effloresce” is a chemical term which means for crystals to form on a substance. This often happens through evaporation, and typically produces the formation of salts. In this sense, I am tapping into the idea of a color, hue, or tone change in our turquoise. When sin is present, it signifies impending harm or doom. 3) I use a lot of terms which one should associate with chemistry. Beyond “effloresce,” the word “asceticism” should trigger the close word “acetic,” as in acetic acid, as many often mistakenly call asceticism “aceticism.” Debased should trigger the thought of bases. When you mix an acid (acetic) with a base you get water and a salt. In this sense, I am saying that asceticism (an acid) mixed with sin debasing (a base) creates a perfect combination for our destruction. It was this combination which created the hardest of hearts not in prostitutes and sinners, but in the religious elite.

Turquoise was known as or associated with “pirouzeh” by the Persians (who lived in a land where turquoise was abundant), which means “victory.” They would use it on their armor and weapons.

This is a reference to the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man – Jesus Christ – as seen in Daniel and Revelation. Our victory is not in our asceticism, but in the victory of Christ.

The “Parousia” is a theological term for Christ’s return in judgment, which is also when he comes in final victory (as in pirouzeh). When he returns he will separate the sheep from the goats, all hay and stubble will be burned while precious metals are refined, and evil will be no more. This is our hope.

Because of Christ’s assured victory, we should pray in bold confidence. We don’t pray because it merits us anything, but because God’s Kingdom is assured and we want it to be on earth just as it is in heaven. We patiently await the Day of the Lord when all will be made right.

## Amethyst

The rage of red will rails against the wrong

While banality to blue will's bequeathed

The first seeks to cut short another's song

Latter never incisiveness unsheathes

But when bled together, these reds and blues

A royal color's beckoned to come forth

Majestic depth construed in purple hues

Dominion comes through sobriety's force

A sober-minded one will never hate

Nor allow good opportunity missed

For sobriety sees as clear as day

Cutting through the fog as does amethyst

The one given to strong drink or passions

Never creates - only themselves fashioned

[Mt. 5:21-26]. Amethyst is a purple gem once thought to provide sobriety while drinking, clarity while looking into the future, and was a beautiful purple – the color of royalty.

Here I juxtapose the colors red and blue. Red is often associated with anger and is a hot, vibrant, open color. Blue, on the other hand, is often associated with the “blues,” and is a colder color. Whereas red here is symbolized as attacking, blue is symbolized as representing passivity.

I expound here on the first two lines, more in regard to anger and passivity than to the colors. Anger, hatred, and aggressiveness seek to “end another’s song,” representative of killing another – whether that’s directly through murder or indirectly through hatred. Others are an object in our way which must be stopped. Jesus told us that to hate is to kill, as both seek the undoing of a human impediment through objectification. For the passivity, I use a word play with “incisiveness.” To “incise” means to cut. Incisiveness here means perceptive or smart. One who refuses to engage the world never whips out their intellect in order to address the world’s problems. They simply sit back. So when I say they never “unsheathe” their incisiveness, it is meant to play off the root of the word which can imply cutting, as one would normally unsheathe a sharp object, like a sword. In this sense, the blue and red are the antitheses of each other, with one signifying aggression and the other inaction. This notion also plays on the idea of anger. When we think of anger we usually think of weapons and physical aggression. However, while the angry one here is chided for wanting to harm another, the passive one here is chided for not unsheathing their intellect and will. The middle ground, then, will be that we must be aggressive in this world, but not with weapons seeking physical harm. Our battle is not with flesh and blood.

I continue with the violent imagery here as I reference “bled together.” Blue and red together make purple, which is historically the color of royalty. So when we mix our aggression or assertiveness with our willingness to hold back, we get the perfect combination. This is what subjects of the Kingdom, or rulers who will judge angels (as Paul calls us), will do. We are royal ambassadors of the Kingdom of God.

One who is angry and aggressive does not have dominion over the world as God intended. They do not rule the world, but are rather ruled by their emotions. They don’t tend and keep, as God described the way their dominion should be. Instead, they seek, subjugate, and destroy out of selfish ambition and vain conceit. Likewise, one who is not assertive does not have dominion as God intended, for they assert their reign over nothing. Dominion comes through sobriety – clear thinking uncompromised by any substance (e.g. alcohol) or action (e.g. lack of sleep) which would cloud our ability to move forward in wisdom.

Amethyst was thought by some ancients to help cut the effects of alcohol and produce sobriety. It was also thought at times to help have clarity in seeing the future.

Living in anger and aggression or indulgent passivity means one does not have dominion. Rather than being creators or individuals who better the world, they are controlled by the world in which they live. These individuals are

fashioned by their environment and circumstances. But our call as Christians is to have dominion over the world using the means God intended.

## \*Emerald

Erin, fair maiden whom all do admire

Wielding a power few will ever know

Power to allure all harbored desire

Power to smite with a look, all her foes

But Erin's fair beauty was taken when

Men in God's image inverted His plan

Objectifying others, which therein

Moulded their God in the image of man

Now rest your eyes not upon Erin's breast

Nor upon that which you think she could give

Just rest your eyes upon that which attests

Your equal stands before you and God lives

Rest weary eyes upon this emerald

And heed divine image others herald

 [Mt. 5:27-32]. I found two interesting attributes ascribed to emeralds throughout history. One is that they are able to help the wearer cut through infatuation (usually to see or hear the truth when speaking to a lover), and they were thought to be peaceful to gaze upon and helped the eyes to rest.

Erin represents two things. First, it represents a beautiful young woman. The inherent beauty of this woman is power, in that it draws out the deepest passions and desires of many who gaze upon her. Figuratively she can smite them with her looks, but this can also be literal. Others may be willing to kill for her out of their passions. The second thing meant by “Erin” is “Ireland.” I’ll expound on this more a little later, but Erin is actually a name the Irish have used for Ireland, particularly in their poetry (sometimes spelled slightly differently). Ireland is also known as the “Emerald Isle.” In this sense, “Erin” also stands for the “Emerald Isle,” which not only incorporates the picture of emeralds into the poem, but brings us to a different level of passions and infatuation. While people may kill and lust over a beautiful woman, many will also kill and lust over the power a country holds. This should be readily apparent in today’s environment which is rife with nationalism…I mean patriotism.

There is a lot going on in this stanza.

1) The second and fourth lines of this stanza are almost a direct quote from William Drennan’s poem, “When Erin First Rose.” It was in this poem in which Ireland was first referred to in print as “The Emerald Isle.” The poem is wonderful and I highly recommend you read it. The lines I used can be found in the last two lines of the second stanza. You can find it here: <https://www.libraryireland.com/CIL/DrennanErin.php>.

2) This stanza argues that this beauty and power possessed by Erin (the power of women or the power of authority and dominion particularly of a nation, depending on which way you’re reading it) has been corrupted. Beauty and dominion are not bad things. In fact, we see both prior to Genesis 3 and the fall of humanity. However, rather than allowing God to define what is good and respect his parameters, we have defiled his creation. Rather than admire the beauty of woman or the dominion we are supposed to assert through servanthood, we invert the image of God in others and corrupt the way we image God to creation. Instead of bowing to God and acknowledging his image, we fashion idols of God made in our own image. Instead of living in an upside down kingdom, we build a kingdom around ourselves. As we set ourselves up as gods, we objectify all else for our benefit.

3) I Corinthians 11 tells us that woman is the glory of man. While many patriarchists have taken this to mean some sort of subordinationism in that it places women under men, I hold to the view that this elevates women. While women, like men, are humans who bear God’s image, women also have the added attribute of blessing man (since Eve was taken out of Adam). In this sense, women are doubly beautiful, reflecting the one by whom they were created (God) and the one from whom they came out of (man). From “Paul and Gender,” “’Woman is the glory of man’ is actually a positive evaluation of women and indicates a high status, because she is both the image and glory of God, and she has such additional beauty that she is the glory of humanity. She is the glory of man by virtue of the fact that she was created from him, and that is why her glory, her beauty, reflects on him.” Women were created as the glory of man and it was only after the fall, in the curse, where it was described (not prescribed) that men would subject women as inferiors. This subjugation and treatment as unequal is an inversion of God’s image reflected equally in all of humanity, regardless of race, status, or gender.

4) While this subjugation of others is a direct reference to male/female relations in Genesis, we see the same thing play out on a higher authoritative level in government. Rather than faithfully and uncompromisingly serve, we domineer and use force to make others follow our will, which is generally self-interested. Selfishness abounds in all systems, but in a democratic, capitalistic, and materialistic system it is encouraged and perpetuated not only in the aristocracy who seek their own interest, but in every individual who is told to vote, purchase, and live by the guiding light of self-interest.

This stanza is pretty straightforward. We are not to objectify others and utilize power for self-interest. We are to recognize the image of God borne by others.

Referencing one of the supposed powers of an emerald – to give one’s eyes rest and clarity through passions – I am saying that we need to simply gaze upon the emerald. We need to just allow it to be and not objectify it. The opposite of objectifying would be to subjectify. What I mean by that is instead of turning something into an object of my subjective desires and goals, I allow the subject upon which I gaze to declare it’s own image. So as we look at women, men, children, government, or any other group or form of power, we must always do so with a clarity that cuts through our passions, self-interest, and objectification. We must recognize and heed God as declared through his image bearers rather than attempting to fashion and form God into our image. We do not import our desires upon others. That is objectification. We allow others to shine their light and reflect their image to us. We are observers of other image bearers, not creators. There is so much more I’d love to write here, particularly as it relates to how I see Drennan’s poem represented here – both where my poem complements his ideas as well as where we differ. He talks about a lot of things I could pull out, like mercy, vengeance, bigotry, etc. But I’ll leave it at this for now. For more on objectification, see Appendix 9.

## \*Diamond

On ancient day upon which Adam fell

Tears of fallen gods rained down like diamonds

Their laughter deigned to men unto flood's swell

A flash of wrath against sounding sirens

Harsh judgment once befell those rebellious

Save for those who had faith in ark of wood

Same salvation holds true for those today

Who hark in faith him who in their place stood

But warnings stand for those refusing beck

Those who do not confess all they've done wrong

For they who seek to judge another's speck

Will fail to rise and meet perfection's slog

Let words spoken be as soft as they're true

Or mosey to judgment, your fate to hew

[Mt. 5:33-37 and Mt. 7:1-5]. There are many diamond associations I’ll get to later, but the important starting point is that diamonds are said to have been used by Jewish high priests to help in judging. They were specifically used to help judge truthfulness and falsity, as diamonds were said to shine more if someone was telling the truth. For this reason I use it to refer to Matthew on judgment and truthfulness (specifically in contexts of judgment or legal issues).

There are two double meanings in this line. First, Adam fell on an ancient day in the sense that he fell a long time ago. However, it also means that he dashed his foot or came up against the Ancient of Days, another name for God. His offense occurred long ago and it was against the Ancient of Days. The other double meaning lies in Adam. Adam literally means Adam, but it also is a reference to diamond, which gets its name from the Greek “adamas,” meaning invincible. This second meaning gives the first line an ironic twist in that our Adam was far from invincible. Even that which appears invincible cannot stand against our God.

The Greeks believed diamonds were tears of the gods and Romans believed they came from falling stars. I hit on both of those concepts in this line. Using a Divine Council motif which understands the multiple uses of plural “elohim” in the Old Testament to be referencing a divine council of beings (though none divine or uncreated as God is), I here refer to the “gods.” When Adam fell, the gods wept. Some, those who followed God, wept for sadness. But here I talk about the fallen gods. These are the ones who followed Satan in rebellion and were rooting for humanity’s demise. In the ancient world, stars were thought to be divine beings. Some argue that in certain places in scripture where we see the stars falling, it is a reference to fallen angels. Whether that’s true or not, it is a commonly held belief and one I’m running with here, though not necessarily supporting. So in this sense, the tears of the gods cover Greek thought on diamonds, and the fallen gods (or fallen stars, metaphorically) cover the Roman conception of diamonds as well as certain Jewish and Christian streams of thought.

One may ask in line three why the fallen gods would cry over Adam’s fall. Here we see that they are tears of laughter, not sadness. This evil laughter continues until the time of Noah, as the demonic corrupted humanity even more (see Genesis 6 and the book of Enoch for specifics). Eventually, God withdrew his protection because the world was so out of control, and the waters of the deep once again encroached on the earth.

The “flash” here is meant to trigger back to the word “flood,” as the flood suddenly came upon people. We also get a glimpse of this in the gospels where Jesus talks about the judgment being like the days of Noah, where one is suddenly taken while another is left. Sirens here means that the wrath is coming against the siren call of the demonic who enticed humanity from Adam onward. It is also a word indicating the warning of God’s judgment through rebellion, as in a warning siren.

This is a reference back to the flood from the stanza before. Only those who put their faith in the ark (representing God’s promise) were saved.

I Peter 3 references Noah and the salvation we have through baptism (representing Jesus as Peter goes on to explain, and as he set up in Chapter 1 as well). Noah is usually thought of as a type of Christ for a number of reasons you can look up. Christians today, like Noah, place their faith in Jesus, often represented by the wood of the cross.

This is an allusion to a book called “In My Place Condemned He Stood” by J.I. Packer and Mark Denver. The book is about penal substitutionary atonement. While I have come to believe that penal substitution is an incomplete picture of the atonement – just one of many facets (like a diamond) – substitution is certainly a part of the atonement. I am able to place my hope in the cross of Christ because Christ stands in for me in some way. He is my representative to whom my sins are imputed, and from whom is imputed righteousness to me. See N.T. Wright for some great discussions on the atonement.

“Beck” here, as in “beck and call.” It signifies a gesture or invitation. Christ has gestured to us with the cross to come and dine with him and accept his offer of the Kingdom.

Those who fail to unburden their guilt in Christ and join his Kingdom are bound to the law. The law requires perfection – something no one can attain. To refuse Christ is to bind oneself to the slog (or tedious, continual work) of being perfect in following the law. It’s an impossible and tedious path. “Slog” here is also intended to allude to the word “logs,” as Matthew talks about not looking at the speck in another’s eye, but taking out the log in one’s own eye first. Since “speck” was referred to in the previous line and “slog” is simply “logs” if you change the position of the “s,” the reader should get that allusion.

Our words, then, should be tempered with softness. Jesus talks often about forgiveness as stemming from the realization of how much we’ve been forgiven. Those who loved Jesus the most are those who had been forgiven the most. The prostitutes and tax collectors tended to be the most transformed. With such a realization, our judgment upon others – especially those outside the church (see I Cor. for this discussion) – should be loving and soft. It shouldn’t compromise truth, but it should compromise judgmentalism. What we say must always be true, as Christ discusses in his piece about oaths in Matthew 5. But true does not mean harsh. For more on forgiveness, see Appendix 10.

There’s a ton going on here. 1) “Mosey” is an allusion to the Mohs scale of hardness when classifying rocks. Diamonds are the hardest on this scale at 10. Having just talked about being soft with our words and since the poem is about diamonds who are known for being the (or one of the) hardest substance, I threw this in. I also use this to set up another concept I’ll get to in a second.

2) Jesus says if we are unforgiving and harp on the sins of others, God won’t forgive us. We will be judged. In this line I allude to a common judgment we think of in movies and from history, which is to work in a quarry or mine hewing out stone. It alludes to a labor camp.

3) Beyond depicting a labor camp signifying judgment, “hew” is also used to mean something along the lines of conformity (“hew the line”). So a failure to conform to Christ (or hew the line), which is a Christian’s goal (Rom. 8 et. al.), will bring about judgment. So here we’re referring to the idea of conformity.

4) Notions of conformity come into play, especially with diamonds, as there is a huge list of standards diamonds must conform to (without impurities) in order to be more costly. Judgment when coupled with conformity should bring in ideas of the fiery judgment we will all go through as our works are tried to separate the bad from the good works and remove the dross, hay, and stubble – leaving us more pure because we’re more conformed to God.

5) There is an irony at play here in the couplet. To better hew, we must be soft. By being soft we will be a more precious stone as far as Christ and his Kingdom are concerned. That is the opposite of what one would think, as things higher on the Mohs scale would be better tools to hew things out. But this is one of the paradoxes of Christianity (as Chesterton refers to them). By being soft, conforming to Christ, and submitting to his ways – by confessing our sins and laying them upon Christ – we are avoid the judgment. As Lewis puts it, there are those who say to God “thy will be done,” and those to whom God says “thy will be done.” Our ultimate judgment rests not on God’s vindictiveness or our merit, but upon a submission to being conformed to the image of Christ and placing our trust in him.

## Ruby

Ruby reds begin to cloud my vision

Hot emotions flood the depths of my soul

Hateful thoughts transform mind into prison

From reign of vengeance ne'er a caracole

Only blood can satiate my fierce thirst

Another's oblation to the divine

Only when gods have exacted their worst

Will peaceful ones like me no more repine

But bloodletting's always unrelenting

Never enough blood to cure or prevent

As one whose life is the ultimate thing

Can never from their self-int'rest repent

Only security that we can know's

Willingness to give life for friends and foes

[Mt. 5:38-48]. Rubies were used as gems of protection and security.

The first stanza is meant to convey ideas often associated with the color red (hot, hateful, vengeance, reds), as the gem in view here is a Ruby. I also discuss how these emotions and thoughts are not good with the language I use (cloud, prison, and flood).

This last line summarizes the position this vengeful person is in. Vengeance reigns in their life so much that they will not take a step to the left or to the right from the path they are on. I have a number of things in mind here. 1) Simply, I’m saying that those controlled by this passion of vengeance or on an immovable path. They are controlled and won’t divert their course. 2) I use the word caracole which is a word intended to be used specifically for horse maneuvering. In this sense, I am claiming that one who is filled with violence is no longer fully human, but beastly (as the Bible often symbolizes of inhuman humans). 3) Reign should also cause the reader to think of the alternative spelling and meaning of this word, “rein.” This should especially be so since I used the word “caracole” to bring horse imagery to mind. When violence is in one’s view, it tends to lead an individual by the reins. It controls them.

This oblation can be meant in two ways. In one sense, for me to require the blood or pain of another is to set myself up as divine. To say that a slight against me is worthy of another’s painful infliction is to think rather highly of myself. It is setting myself up as a god. But this can also be viewed from a more Christian perspective. Many times conservatives tend to claim a view of God’s law and holiness which is extremely high, then damn all those who break the law (except themselves and their group/party, of course). To sit as judges who condemns others is to not only overlook our own sin, but it overlooks God’s mercy and grace towards sinners. We set ourselves up as gods when we assume a position which brings violence upon another human being on God’s behalf.

These two lines reflect the notion that most people have, which is that the problem is “out there” rather than “in here” – in our own hearts. If God would just judge the world and if I could just exact justice on those people, then the world would be made right and we’d all live happily. See, I’m really a peaceful, loving person, but not while those problem people are happy. Such a view fails to recognize one’s own complicity in creating a world saturated with evil.

If life is the thing held most dear, one will cling to it at all costs. This is one thing which sets Christianity apart from other worldviews. We are to consider our lives lost for the sake of our God and our neighbor (which includes enemies). MLK noted that this change in ideology was actually what catapulted him in his movement, as he was only freed to love and do justice when he laid down his defenses and submitted to the possibility of suffering for love.

The problem with holding our lives so dear is that doing so often means acting at the expense of others. Sometimes we draw blood indirectly, through our materialistic greed and our willingness to subjugate people in far away lands for our comfort and security, or to demonize migrants who seek to come into our country of plenty. Often times we are willing to draw blood more directly, through the use of force (self-defense, military, slander, etc). But we often find that no matter how much violence we do, it is never enough to provide us with enough security or vengeance. We can see this played out in the real world all the time. Hitler was created from the Allies taking vengeance on Germany. The Middle East as we know it was created out of the West’s greed and violence, particularly in WWI. ISIS was created out of our violence towards Bin Laden and his followers as well as our war in Iraq. Violence rarely, if ever resolves anything. Instead, it perpetuates a cycle of violence. For a great look at this very idea, check out the movie “The Kingdom.” The end is phenomenal and shows this cyclical nature of violence – even violence we perceive as justified.

Christians don’t attempt to find their security in the temporal. Sure, comfort is nice and we want to live. But our ultimate hope is eternal. When we understand our hope – that it is both assured and eternal – nothing can shake us. This assurance comes in the precious, ruby red blood of our savior, shed of his own volition at the hands of the violent world we help create and perpetuate. It is through sacrifice, not violence, that we have our hope. For more on this powerful kind of love, see Appendix 11.

## \*Topaz

The greed of gold borne in the soul abounds

A voice inside our heads which drives us mad

Our one goal, to control, always resounds

Pride completing endogenous dyad

Wealth makes it all too easy to be smug

And become a bad friend like Eliphaz

Or even worse, wealth fabricates humbug

Making God a servant to our topaz

So heed the words of him with golden mouth

Never allow complacency to set

For our God is the Lord of Sabaoth

Before whom one day all knees will be bent

Give your gifts now with generosity

And learn wherein lies true security

 [Mt. 6:1-4]. Topaz is a yellow gem which signified wealth and gold and was believed to attract gold to the wearer.

There is a double meaning here. First, borne in the soul means what it says, which is that greed is carried by the soul. There is a weight and a marring done to our soul as it carries greed. But greed is also born or formed in our souls. It isn’t what’s on the outside that defiles us, but that which comes from the inside. Greed is not born when we come in contact with gold, but is born on the inside of us. This greed isn’t all that particular to individuals, but it abounds both in terms of who it affects (all people), and in terms of how greatly it affects each of us.

The dyad – the two part composition of every human (if you’re a dualist, like most Christians are), begins as pride seeking control. In our arrogance we set ourselves up as gods and believe we are the center of the universe. We ourselves are worth preserving and elevating. In order to accomplish our ascension to divinity, we must have control. We must control not only the environment around us (for both pleasure and security), but also individuals. This dyad is endogenous, or created internally (just as was referenced a few lines earlier where evil comes out of us, it doesn’t go into us) and is common to all humanity. There is also a double meaning intended here, as “dyad” should trigger the thought of the very close word “dryad.” Dryads were the living beings who inhabited trees in Greek mythology. While often considered beautiful and wonderful, encounters with them could also be very dangerous, leaving one mad, dumb, etc. Here, endogenous dyad (or dryad) signifies that this pride and control are the true spirit residing within our corporeal body – a spirit which when encountered and fed can perpetuate and exacerbate our maddened state.

Eliphaz was one of Job’s friends. He came from a land known for its wisdom. Many interpretations of the name “Eliphaz” show it as meaning “El (or god, as in ‘elohim’) is fine gold.” This name adds to the gold theme, but so does Eliphaz’s actions. Eliphaz promoted what we would call a prosperity gospel today. He, a wealthy and wise man, sat smugly in his perceived wealth. He though his wealth and security were tied to his morality. He was untouchable by God because he was a good man. Conversely, the judgment which befell Job must have been because Job was morally compromised. In this way, Eliphaz was blind to his own sinfulness before God, but also blind to the great insecurity in his life despite his current wellbeing. His trust was not in God but in his own perceived morality and wealth.

Wealth constructs a deceitful story (humbug). I use “fabricate” here in a triple sense, as fabricate can mean to “construct” or can also mean “lie/deceive.” It’s a double emphasis on wealth’s ability to deceive us and misguide us. It is also a literary reference to the infamous Scrooge whose most famous word was “humbug.” In this sense, wealth has a tendency to harden our hearts like scrooge. That’s because the greatest deception of wealth is that God is not the giver of wealth, but that God is subservient to it. By bowing our knees to wealth as our security, we are telling God that these things are better and safer than he is. We elevate pleasure and security while denigrating God.

“Lord of Sabaoth” occurs twice in the New Testament of which I’m aware (Rom. 9:29 and James 5:4), at least in the King James Version it goes untranslated. The word means “armies.”

The man with a golden mouth refers to John Chrysostom, whose name meant “golden mouthed.” He was supposedly an unparalleled orator. I use him here because his name is yet one more reference to gold in this poem. I also use Chrysostom because in his book “On Wealth and Poverty,” he addresses wealth and greed. Of it, he says, “In this way luxury often leads to forgetfulness. As for you, my beloved, if you sit at table, remember that from the table you must go to prayer. Fill your belly so moderately that you may not become too heavy to bend your knees and call upon your God.” So in this stanza, I allude to Chrysostom’s quote here, reminding individuals that we must never be complacent, we must remember our God, and that our God is the ultimate judge before whom all knees will bow. If we are too caught up in our wealth now and running after it rather than bowing the knee before our God now, we will one day end up bowing the knee before him anyway, though it will be under different circumstances – judgment vs. service.

Matthew 5 tells us to be perfect like God is perfect, then goes on to describe generosity as a part of how such a feat is to be accomplished. By giving our money away without consideration of another’s praise or without consideration of the practicality of the act, we learn to trust God both for our means and for the outcome of our gifts. As we learn to be generous, our faith in God grows and our dependence on wealth diminishes. Ironically, it is in this giving away of our wealth and placing of our trust in God that our security grows.

## \*Sapphire

Blue collared workers work to pay the bills

White collared workers work so they're not blue

The first, harbor of all our social ills

Second, enforcers of what is taboo

Day will arrive when our Lord comes again

Redeeming blues through Saturnalia

No more wanting, no more a social plan

All clothed with same Sapphired regalia

Time is as fleeting as the passions are

While future’s as sure as where our hope lies

In present, then, we each must work so hard

Ensuring passions don’t our hope belie

Until day our bridegroom comes to redeem

We mortify our sin, fasting unseen

I know it’s a generality that blue collared workers make less than white collared workers, and that they work to scrape by. I know because I was a “professional teacher,” and I made less than a number of other lucrative professions like welders, mechanics, etc. I am not at all making a value difference, but a general observation. Blue collared workers tend to be looked down upon because they are generally working to pay rent, food, electricity, etc. Often times the less well-off live more day to day. On the flip side, the white collared workers work to survive as well, but in a different way. The white collared workers who are able to look beyond today recognize that life is vain. As such, they work and work in order to obtain more money, and through money, more things. They work to keep the blues away. This both means that they work to maintain their status and not become blue collared, but even more so, it means they work in order not to become depressed and suicidal. But this materialism is just a vain pursuit meant to numb the pain.

Again, my slight on the blue collared isn’t my own position, but from the perspective of the elite. The elite believe that the poor and lower class are where social ills are born and raised. We see this by aversions to immigrants, aversions to the poor, aversions to those in particularly lower-class occupations (e.g. fast food), etc. But ironically, it is the white collared, or upper class who gets to define what taboo means. Obviously their definition is self-serving and perpetuates subjugation of others while perpetuating their own status. We can see this in how white collared crimes and individuals are prosecuted, the length of punishment, etc. We can also readily see that the white collared are no more socially graced, as they are frequently involved in great evils. The white collards are constantly trying to assert power, grab money, and subjugate others, defining what is good and evil, taboo and acceptable.

Saturnalia was a festival celebrating the god Saturn. It was a time of great feasting and celebration. In this sense, the merrymaking rids us of the blues, as in sadness. However, Saturnalia was also a time when social classes and distinctions disappeared. As one common example, the masters would serve the slaves dinner first, and slaves could speak freely and critically to their masters. They could also dress like freed people. I use Saturnalia both because I think it is a beautiful depiction of what Christ actually does permanently for those in the Kingdom now, and what he will make permanently for all when he returns, both in terms of our equality and in terms of our partying, banqueting, and feasting. I also use Saturnalia because Saturn is one of the main gods associated with blue sapphire.

There will be no more wanting both in the sense of needs, but also in the sense of envious wanting, like that found in materialism. We will have all provisions and will share freely, having no need of evil desires or creating social plans to provide for those who are not being provided for.

Passions, like time, disappear. They either disappear because they are fickle and changing, because we temporarily satiate them until they return, or because we die and have them no more. Hope – at least the hope of the Christian, however, is a permanent hope grounded in the immutable. If our hope is in the Almighty, immutable One, then our future is unwavering, as is the hope we can have today.

As Christians, we have competing desires. We desire to live in accordance with our hope, but we also continue to have our fleshly desires and lack of faith. Our job is to live in accordance with our hope and not give into vain and fleshly desires. This doesn’t mean we abhor pleasure, but we hold it in perspective of the eternal and the meaningful.

If we are to have hope and subdue fleshly desires, we must then mortify sin in our flesh. This mortification is an allusion to John Owen’s book, “The Mortification of Sin,” a wonderful read about how and why believers (or followers, as I’ve begun to call them) should be putting sin to death in their flesh. In Matthew, one of the ways we see Jesus telling us to be perfect like God is by fasting. This fasting is not intended to be seen by others, or that would be self-serving. It’s not meant as something which appeases God in and of itself. This fasting is an action which teaches us that 1) we are dependent on God (e.g. Jesus in the desert and “man cannot live by bread alone), and

2) that our desires can be lessened and controlled. By weakening the power desire has over us – even good desires like eating – we help discipline ourselves to choose against fleshly desires. We also learn to depend on God and we are able to use the time we save on preparing and eating meals to pray and focus on God. Every twinge we feel in our stomachs reminds us of our provider and our hope. While Jesus doesn’t say or imply the following, I also think that in light of all those in the world who are suffering without food, that we join them in solidarity as we choose not to indulge – or more likely in our Western lives, overindulge. Choosing to forego food helps us to live lives focused on others. As many early saints who fasted remind us, it doesn’t merely allow us to live in solidarity intangibly, but also tangibly. As we forego a few meals, the money or food not used on ourselves can be used for others. Fasting, then, should not be some empty ritual. It should focus us on God, mortify sin in our flesh, remind us of our dependence and hope, help us live in solidarity with our fellow humans, and allow us to tangibly help those in need. Fasting is a practice which gives us a foretaste of its opposite – the feast where all are united and equal. It helps us to reflect on this truth of equality and worship now, and hope for its future assurance for the world. See Appendix 12 for a deeper discussion on desires.

## Garnet

Can eyes foresee what tattered lives bespeak?

Can flesh give some of itself unto life?

Or is our mind illumined by what's bleak

And beings marred and with corruption rife?

We see Noah light his path with Garnet

A decent man with his family saved

Yet what came out of the maritime pit

Was same broken humanity depraved

As in Adam all we, like Noah, die

So like him through one man we'll all be saved

One who embarked on Messianic Arc

Defeated death with life inside the grave

The one came from heaven and treasured Earth

That those of Earth could seek the kingdom first

Can people see what the lives of the poor and downtrodden evidence? Also, can our eyes foresee what the lives of the poor prophecy about us and our culture if they remain unnoticed and not helped?

Can we, through our flesh save another? If we’re all starving and I give of my flesh to be eaten, am I really sustaining a life? Jesus asked a similar question and repulsed quite a lot of people. To eat our flesh and to drink our blood is not life, but death.

Unfortunately, we are blind to the poor and downtrodden and our flesh is mortal. We do not have life on the inside. We are the walking dead.

One of the only things I was able to find about garnet is that tradition holds it is a stone Noah used to illuminate the ark while on the water.

Noah and his family went into a boat for salvation, but came out a still depraved group of people. It didn’t take long for them to exhibit that depravity and create a terrible world. This is why I use the word “pit,” as it not only indicates a literal pit, but it is a word often used as a name for hell. Evil was in Noah and continued after the flood. What came out of the ark was evil.

This is a clear reference to Romans. Through Adam and through Christ we inherit curses and blessings.

“Arc” here has two meanings, one talking about the arc or path of Christ’s life, and the other is a reference back to Noah’s ark. Here we see that Jesus, unlike Noah, exited the pit not depraved, but perfect. He defeated death with his life and exited glorified. It is through this salvation that we have true salvation and hope. Here garnet is also significant because garnet did have some early connections to Christ’s blood because of its deep red color. So like Noah illuminated the ark with garnet, Christ illuminated the tomb with his blood as it provided life and resurrection, and now provides the same for us.

With this great salvation we have we have through Christ we should seek the Kingdom first.

## \*Jade

In life the only certainty we get

Is that death for each of us is assured

We, like the gods, ensure through jade rabbit

Our destiny’s sufficiently insured

But pestle and mortar cannot concoct

A cure for pestilence which mortifies

Impending doom, our sacred lives, defrocks

And minds, in time, to lunacy it drives

What can we prize in life's vap'rous glory?

Truth - a lowly and humble parapet

Our choice, to bay as beasts in furore

Or put truth into our pipes and smoke it

Worry not for tomorrow is its own

And emperor is seated on his throne

[Mt. 6:25-34]. While jade can have a number of colors, green is the most well known (along with white). Especially in Asia (particularly China), jade was thought of as scholarly and imperial. It could supposedly increase the longevity of your life and heal.

The “Jade Rabbit” (or hare) is a shape ancients in the East saw in the moon. If you look it up, you can find the shape of a rabbit who appears to be grinding up substances with a mortar and pestle. This rabbit supposedly mixed the elixir of life for the gods. I reference it here because of the reference to “jade,” but also because jade has an association with nobility and status – which the gods certainly had. We set ourselves up as gods as we seek to immortality the same. The last line with “Destiny” also makes this stanza a nerd reference, as the “jade rabbit” is an exotic weapon in the Destiny franchise of video games.

There is a wordplay going on here, as the “pestle” and “mortar” the jade rabbit uses has as its roots “pest” and “mort.” We see these roots come back in “pestilence” and “mortifies.” This isn’t a mere repetition of root words, but rather a juxtaposition of ideas. Whereas the rabbit uses his “pest” and “mort’ to perpetuate life, we see that “pest” and “mort” are the ultimate takers of life. This doesn’t mean that it is the rabbit in the moon that kills us, but rather that placing our hope in such things is the opposite of true life. There are also a lot of things going on just with the word “mortifies” here, as there are a number of definitions coming into play here. In short, it means that it brings about fear (I’m mortified), it brings about decay, and it is death (mortem in Latin is death) to us mortals.

The knowledge of our demise, in time, disrobes our vain and lofty beliefs about ourselves. No matter how great someone is in life, they are made equal in death. We stand naked in front of the world with this truth, and it hurts. To dwell on this truth and acknowledge it, in time, can drive us mad. “Lunacy” here is yet another tie-in to the moon which was introduced as our jade rabbit’s home.

This is nearly a direct quote from an ancient Chinese poem called “The Old Dust” by Li Bai (or Li Po, or Li Bo). The line referenced is the final line of the poem: “What is there to prize in the life’s vaporous glory?” I only changed it to fit the iambic pentameter of the sonnet format. Bai’s poem is largely about how short our lives are and how the finitude of our lives seems to make them purposeless.

So what can we prize in life if everything about our lives is fleeting? Well, it seems the one thing that is not fleeting is truth. What is true now is always true. If it is 10:12 right now, while it won’t always be 10:12, it will always be true that it was 10:12 at the point at which I said it was 10:12. Truth is immutable, though truths about mutable things change as those things grow, age, learn, etc. I could truthfully say that I will be 33 tomorrow, and I could say that each day for about another month. But one day, I must stop saying that because it will no longer be true. The truthfulness of my statements haven’t changed, but my position changes the need for me to recognize a new truth which corresponds to my situation. But as I discussed in line 8, the acceptance of truth, particularly the truth that death is inevitable (and according to Bai, the vanity which comes from this truth), drives us to lunacy. That’s why here I refer to truth as being a low “parapet.” In my mind I’m imagining our lives as like traversing a high, narrow bridge. If truth is our guiding purpose, it’s an awfully low parapet to protect us from either falling over or choosing to jump over the edge. Hedonists and suicidal nihilists aren’t anywhere different on the spectrum of their understanding of truth, they simply differ as to how they live in light of that truth. Truth in and of itself isn’t helpful. Alvin Planginga’s evolutionary argument against naturalism raises this same problem as he shows how truth is irrelevant for (and it can also be logically followed that it is sometimes even harmful to) survival.

There are three meanings in here. First, to “bay” should once again bring ideas of the moon back into play, as wolves bay at the moon. Second, English readers commonly read “Bai” (as in Li Bai) as BAY, though I believe it’s actually pronounced BY E. So this is a reference back to Li Bai. Finally, I unpack the first option we have living in meaninglessness. First, we can become like beasts and throw off rationality. We can choose to believe that love, free will, and purpose exist in a physical world though we know they can’t. We can absolutely ignore the implications of the truth and suppress it. See Appendix 13 for discussions on truth and love on a naturalistic system.

There is a ton going on in this line. 1) This line references two other options we have to deal with purposelessness of a finite life. One is that we can turn to drugs (represented in the pipe), which is simply a reference for turning to pleasure and substances to numb or ignore the truth. Rather than act like irrational beasts who don’t seem to know the truth, these individuals know the truth but defy it. The cease the day and try to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

2) The second meaning is the idiomatic meaning here of “you can put it in your pipe and smoke it.” That simply means that you can deal with it, whether you like it or not.

3) Jade was particularly thought to add longevity to life if smoked through jade pipes. This reference to putting it (truth implied) in your pipe and smoking it is that the acceptance of truth will actually add longevity to your life. Since I believe the truth is the Christian truth, I don’t think it is a low parapet. I think it is our sustaining hope. I answer how this is the case in the final couplet.

The ultimate truth above all truths is that God is on his throne and reigns in power. This life is a vapor, as James and Bai say, but Christians also know that there is resurrection. The truth that God is in control, that God is love, and that God provides in that he will ultimately preserve us, then we don’t have to look to the past or the future, like Bai, and be depressed. The truth gives us hope, and hope allows us to live today in security. In this sense, we are the most free. Whereas the hedonist is controlled by her fate, being forced to cram as much pleasure into their lives, we Christians are not controlled by our future. We are freed by it to live today as today, and not shackled to tomorrow.

## \*Pearl

To those who know not life our death is vain

Moonshine muscled into our very souls

But they can't see truth of what they disdain

These pearls in mud in which the pig wallows

Ungulates can't know supernatural

Nor can minds fathom the depths of the sea

Unless God overcomes the rational

Changing dumb asses to talking donkeys

To all those who have wisdom let them hear

Before us there stands a pearl of great price

Two choices lay ahead, the first is fear

Second, sell all you have for Paradise

Kingdoms of Earth and Gates of hell will fail

While pearly Gates of conquered will prevail

This refers to the foolishness of the Christian life. To the world, the Christian’s sacrifice and way is foolish. In the first line I say “our death is” rather than “our deaths are” to emphasize the unity and oneness of the Christian life and aim. However, in the next line I will separate this to emphasize that we are still individuals (souls).

Moonshine here can mean three things. 1) They think we’re drunk and intoxicated on religion, like those on the day of Pentacost believed about the Christians. 2) They think our religion is “moonshine,” or craziness. We are ignorant fools. 3) What we are selling is crazy. We’re liars. We’re snake oil salesmen. This is somewhat like setting up Lewis’s “Lord, Liar, Lunatic” example, though without the Lord part. The world believes that this stupidity we believe has muscled its way into our lives – either by force or by massage, by necessity or by brainwashing over time. This idea of “muscle” is also a word play on “mussel,” which are the freshwater variant of the bivalve which forms pearls. In this sense I am alluding to the idea that the pears created in us are pearls from streams of living water (fresh, running water) – a significant image in the New Testament and early church for the life of Christ in us.

This is an obvious allusion to where Matthew talks about throwing our pearls before swine. The pearls of a Christian’s life and wisdom mean nothing to a lost world. Our pearls are muddied by the world, and the beasts cannot recognize their splendor and worth. This use of swine may also have a deeper meaning in Matthew, and it certainly does as I use it. Pigs are one of the few (maybe only, I’m not sure) animals which appear clean on the outside (cloven hooved) but are not clean on the inside (don’t chew their cud). Without a close inspection of swine, nobody would ever know they were unclean by their appearance. Often times it is the same way with the wise/fool, believer/unbeliever, etc.

I carry on with the theme of beasts and pigs in two ways. First, I refer to “ungulates,” which are just hoofed animals. Second, I use the word “supernatural.” In the middle of this word we find the Latin “perna,” which is the word from which “pearl” gets its name. “Perna” means “leg” in Latin, and pearls come from this word because the creatures which form pearls were seen as being in the shape of a leg (a pig or sheep leg). This line, then, emphasizes the beast and pig reference.

The beasts can’t understand the depths of the sea where pearls come from, so how could they understand the supernatural pearls? Here I use “fathom” as a double reference, both to mean “comprehend” as well as to emphasize the depths of the sea, as “fathom” is a unit of large measurement in the ocean depths.

But if God couldn’t give beasts understanding, who then could be saved? We know that God can work in beasts, for we’ve seen it done. He made Balaam’s donkey speak, and he made Nebuchadnezzar dumb like an animal, and then normal again. God can give understanding and blindness. If he can give animals understanding, certainly he can bring about humility and understanding in dumb asses. I of course mean “dumb asses” here in the technical sense of non-verbal donkeys and by no means am stooping to vulgarity – not even in a double entendreic way😉

“Pearl of great price” is a name Jesus gives to the Kingdom of God in Matthew 13.

When we come across a pearl of great price, we have two options. The first is to ignore or pass up the opportunity due to a fear of the gravity of the choice before you. It is indeed a risk to sell everything . But the reward is great. If we pursue the pearl, we receive paradise.

Jesus says that the gates of hell will not prevail against his church. Gates are not offensive, and Jesus means for this to imply that from his resurrection on, the church will be the assailing the gates of hell as Christ’s enemies are made his footstool. Nothing can withstand the onslaught of the church. This onslaught is meant not to be against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of darkness – the gates of hell.

This is a pearly gates reference, a common depiction of heaven which comes from Revelation. I am also depicting the notion of the upside down kingdom here. I say that the conquered will prevail, which seems counterintuitive. But it is those conquered by Christ who will prevail against the world. Second, I say that the gates will prevail, which is counterintuitive. If you read the book of Revelation, you’ll get all of this counterintuitive sort of thing. Conquering and prevailing in Revelation does not look like spilling another’s blood and violently defeating them. In fact, of the 18 times the word “blood” appears in the book of Revelation, 10 (and possibly 11) of those times the blood is that of the martyrs or of Christ. The other 7-8 times it is referenced metaphorically in relation to judgment (e.g. the moon turns to blood). Revelation is all about heaven conquering not by warring, but by standing firm in love and conquering by the laying down of our lives. We can stand behind the pearly gates of heaven because Christ has already conquered. As it has been said, we don’t fight for victory, we fight from victory. This is the wisdom of God, exemplified by The Wisdom of God. Take these pearls of wisdom to heart.