

## MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

**“The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth” (1 Pet. 1:7)**

In January 1848, James Marshall stumbled on to a gold nugget in the America River’s South Fork. He took it to his boss, John Sutter, who had a massive California land grant of 48,000 acres. The next day both men returned to the area and filled their pockets with gold. Soon the secret was out and thousands came to the area from all over the world. Between April and December 1849 31,000 people arrived by ship to San Francisco. More than 100,000, however, came by the land route that involved a dangerous journey of 2,000 miles through an unmapped wilderness. If you made it, the trip took four to six months.

Those who came first usually didn’t even bother to stake out a claim. They merely picked up the gold on the surface and moved on. One man was reported to have found 30 lbs. of gold in an area that was only four feet square. Another found \$2,000 worth of gold beneath his doorstep.

In those early months crime was almost non-existent as it was as easy to find gold as to steal it. As gold became more scarce, however, violence increased. Indians, unfortunately, were among the first victims. Thousands were killed as the “Forty-niners” crossed through their homelands to get to California. Thousands more were killed in California as the miners took their land in search of gold. At the beginning of the gold rush the Indian population was thought to be in excess of 150,000. In twenty years their numbers were reduced to only 30,000.

John Sutter who had legal claim to most of the wealth wound up with almost nothing. By the end of 1849 his property had been overrun and everything he owned was stolen. In 1864 the California legislature voted to give him a stipend of \$3,000 per year to compensate for his loss.

James Marshall, who found the first nugget, died in poverty. His property was sold at auction to help pay his debts. It only brought \$150.

Leland Stanford did much better. He staked out a claim on one of the richest mines in California. He was said to have found \$50,000 worth of gold in an area less than 12 feet square. His wealth became a political stepping stone to the governorship of California and later to the Senate. When his 15 year old son died, he honoured him by transforming their Palo Alto horse farm into the world renown Stanford University.

Levi Strauss was another big winner, but his wealth did not come from gold, it came from selling dry goods to the miners. He later patented his own special brand of denim trousers and called them “Levis.”

The Bible reminds us that gold perishes. It’s value is not eternal. Peter points us, however, to some striking similarities between gold and our faith. Both, for example, become more valuable when tried by fire.

The Scriptures often use gold as a frame of reference to emphasize the importance of spiritual treasure.

- The judgments of the Lord are more desirable than gold (Ps. 19:10.)
- The commandments of God are better than gold (Ps. 119:127.)
- Wisdom and understanding are better than fine gold (Prov. 3:14.)
- Instruction is better than choice gold (Prov. 8:10.)
- Etc.

Let us never forget that the trial of our faith is much more precious than of gold that perishes. The difficulties, which we may resent at the time, actually purify our faith.

Jesus contrasts earthly wealth and true riches with this stunning comparison: **“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Matt 6:19-21.)**

Your faith, and the trial of your faith, are more precious than gold!