

Gold Rush  
by  
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It all happened innocently enough, I suppose. Deep in the heart of Mammon Mountains a lonely prospector found it; dull yellow grit at the bottom of a stream: gold. Soon the whole country was full of prospectors, and with them came all the problems generally associated with them; greed, vice, violence. Each was fuelled by the other and they all were fuelled by the gold. Each man staked his claim and fought like the devil to keep any other off of it. The mountains became hard places where the goal was gold and men were the tools used to extract it.

Into this mess, at one time or another almost everyone came. Some came and succeeded beyond their greatest dreams. They found legendary lodes of gold and all envied them. Others came, got what they needed, and left. They were an odd group and remarkably rare. Most came and worked hard. They panned, dug, set up sluices, and generally sweated out a bare, meager living from the unforgiving country.

In that land, gold was everything. Food, clothing, shelter, and all other necessities cost gold. A person's worth was measured in the gold they had or were likely to get. The merchants only took gold and nothing else. The prospector, with his dreams, was the king of Mammon Mountains. He would be crowned with the glory of gold or be deposed and leave in disgrace.

Into this harsh world came Eli; he was a prospector and a good one at that. He came to the mountains and joined the basic mess that surrounded the gold rush. He had a good claim that had a stream running through it and a nice shaft mine. He worked hard and soon had a nice supply of gold.

His nearest neighbor was Matt. Matt also had a good claim and the two became friends. One day the two were talking and gold came up in the conversation.

“I wish I would hit the mother load.” Matt said. “All this digging is hard work for just a few little nuggets.”

“I don’t really care about the gold,” Eli said. “I want to find agothates.”

Matt laughed until he almost fell over. “Agothates! Those worthless things! They are nothing but pretty.”

“So what. That is what I am after.”

“Why?”

“I am going to Salem after I am done mining here and the King of Salem likes agothates.”

“Well, I am going to Salem too, but I am not going to waste my time on agothates. I’ll bring my gold there.”

“I don’t think that will work. I heard that--”

“Have you ever been there?”

“Well, no.”

“Then don’t tell me stuff you’re not sure about.”

“But I do know for sure. I read it in the King’s letter.”

“That thing is so old fashioned. Agothates are the most worthless things. It’s nice but useless. Gold is where it is at.”

The two went back to their digs and searched for gold. It wasn’t long before a poor peddler came through. He went to Matt’s dig, and asked pitifully for some gold. “I don’t have any!” he said, “Not even enough for food.”

“Look,” Matt said, “I work hard to dig up this gold and don’t have any to spare right now. You should stake a claim and dig your own.”

“But I can’t find a claim.” The man said. But Matt didn’t listen he went on digging and the poor man left empty handed.

The man went passed Eli’s claim. Eli saw the man and went over to him. “Hello stranger. What brings you here?”

“Can you help me?” the man asked. “I don’t have any gold to get food.”

“Sure, I was just going to get some dinner myself.” Eli answered and led the man to his small hut. There he fed the tired man and let him stay the night. The next morning, Eli gave the man a little gold and told him where he might be able to set up a claim.

“Thank you so much,” the man said. “Here, I want you to have this. It’s not worth much but you can have it.” The man gave Eli an agothate.

“Thank you. And may the King give you peace.”

Many similar things happened. Some times a messenger from the King of Salem would come through. Eli would almost always meet them and give them what little dinner he could afford. He would also send them away with what little gold he had. They were all poor people but the men would show their gratitude by giving Eli agothates. Soon Eli had quite a bag full of the colorful rocks.

Sometimes, especially in hard times, Eli would take the rocks out and look at them. He would look at each one and remember the person who gave it to him. That preacher going to a far away land gave him this green one with a blue stripe. The woman who needed clothes for her children gave him that purple one. This black one came from a beggar. The red one came from a friend who needed help with his hut. Yellow, orange, pink, mauve, teal—on and on the collection went.

Fortunes turned, as they often do, and Matt found himself rich. Matt showed it too. His prospector's hut was changed into a mansion. He hired a gang of men to work his claim. He became a very important man in the Mountains of Mammon. Everyone knew how rich Matt was.

Eli found himself rich as well. But his hut merely became a comfortable house. He hired a few trustworthy men to work his claim; each one shared a little in the profits. He got married and had a son. He became well known in Mammon too, but his notoriety came from his giving. Eli's wealth found its way into the hands of the poor. Missionaries of Salem found support in this simple prospector. His heart grew in proportion to his giving, and soon he found himself giving almost everything away. His family lived simply. Eli provided for his own and for as many others as he could.

Finally, Matt and Eli left the Mountains of Mammon and they both left for Salem. Each one had three pack horses. Matt's horses bent low under the sacks and sacks of the gold of Mammon. Eli's horses carried all they could of the many agothates he had collected.

"Do you really think that the King will be impressed with your load of rocks?" Matt asked as they walked.

"Oh, I don't know." Eli said, "I just couldn't think of leaving them behind. Each one has a story. They are like a record of my life."

"You did bring some gold though, right?"

"No, I left it with my wife and son. I didn't have room."

Matt laughed. "I brought all my gold." He boasted. "What the horses couldn't carry I have in this pack. I'm not going to be caught at Salem without my life's work."

The two arrived at Salem without any difficulty. When they got there the King met them at the gates. He embraced each as if He were greeting a brother.

“How are you my friends?” He asked and then saw the horses’ packs. “What is this?”

“Gifts.” They responded in unison.

At a signal from the King, servants came out and emptied the sacks into a large metal cart. They loaded Matt’s gold into one and Eli’s agothates into another.

“What is going on?” the men asked the King.

“It is simple really. Here in Salem all must be purified. We will try your gifts by fire and enjoy them afterward.” The King led them to a room overlooking a large fire. The servants had brought the loads near the fire and began loading each cart onto a conveyer to take them through the fire.

From where they were Eli, Matt, and the King could see everything. The first cart to go in was full of Eli’s agothates. As they got into the fire, they started exploding and cracking like kernels of popcorn. Matt’s cart went into the fire next and the level of gold quickly dropped. Both men gasped. Had their life’s work been destroyed?

The King led them down to the room. It wasn’t hot for having such a large fire in it. “Don’t worry,” the King said. “This fire burns spiritually. It burns off all vanity and sin; it shows the real worth of your gifts.”

The two men were terrified to look into the large metal carts, but the King left them no room to hesitate. As they approached the servants dumped Eli’s cart at the feet of the King.

Eli’s cart spilled thousands of jewels on the ground. Emeralds, rubies, diamonds, black pearls, carbuncles, amethysts, hundreds of gems of every possible size and color flowed out of the cart and fell about the feet of the King. The King reached down and picked up one emerald; it had a blue stripe on it. “What a beautiful gift!” the King said. “Thank you.”

The three went to the other cart, as they approached the servants dumped the cart at the King's feet. Black ash fell out and they all coughed and choked in the ashes of what had been Matt's gold. When the men got out of the cloud of dust, Eli and Matt set about dusting the ash off the King.

"I don't understand." Matt said as he brushed off the King's robe. "I brought all the purest gold I had."

The King motioned the servants over. They soon had the men clean. "Clean up that mess." The King said once they were cleaned off. He turned to Matt and said, "I will tell you why your gift was ash. You thought that the wealth from Mammon was a gift for Me. If you would have read My letter I would have told you that gold can only be used in Mammon. It is worthless here. You should have spent your time finding agothates like Eli."

Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. 1 Corinthians 3:12-13