

BEAUTY AND ASHES

"...and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified. And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations." -Isaiah 61:2-4

Most of us are more familiar with the verses which just precede this passage, as they were recited by Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth at the beginning of his ministry. We read in the fourth chapter of Luke, whereupon he was handed the book of Isaiah, he found the place and began to read...

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him."

Our text continues where he abruptly left off.

For in the next moment, Christ told his hearers that these words were "fulfilled in their ears". The continuance of that passage was yet future, which I am convinced was the judgement in AD 70 upon Jerusalem and the Jews who'd rejected Christ.

Thus we have the "acceptable year of the Lord" being here contrasted with the (yet future to his listeners) "day of vengeance of our God". While the Lord preached the gospel and walked among them—and even after his crucifixion and resurrection, whilst the apostles spread the word far and wide that the Kingdom of God had been inaugurated—the time was "*acceptable*" (pleasing, favorable, desirable). During that period of about 40 years, some among Israel and among the nations responded favorably, but most did not. A few believed and "endured unto the end". But the followers of Christ were persecuted relentlessly and many martyred—they had been outcasts of society, considered the "off-scourings"; the term "Christian" itself was a label of utmost contempt given to them by their enemies...These were those "who mourned" and which were about to be comforted.

Most of Christianity today has forgotten (or never known) the magnitude of that judgement, nor the world-shattering significance of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and ultimately upon the nations which followed in their wake (namely, the Roman Empire). But the "planting of the Lord" in Isaiah 61 was nothing less than the official coronation of Christ's Kingdom, and of a people who would "raise up the former desolations...of many generations". It was a world-ending paradigm shift, planned from the foundation of the world and promised by Moses and all the prophets—*fulfilled* in that generation which walked with Christ... *As He had promised them* in Matthew 24.

But it was also the historical outworking of God's plan for the ages in the overspreading of the Kingdom. This is a continual process which will progress—like leaven—until all the earth has come under the subjection of the King of kings,

For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. (Habakkuk 2:14)

While this is happening, generations are born, fulfil their time and pass on, and nations arise and fall, leaving their work upon history. It is God's story, pre-written before time itself. We come into it for a brief moment to observe and be tested by it, and, for the believer, "to manifest God's glory" (1 Peter 1:7). The whole first chapter of 1 Peter, in fact, is about this very thing.

Through no work or worthiness of our own, God has favored His people with the true glory of *knowing* this unfathomable mystery...It is even, as Peter later tells us, our *adornment*—it is our **world**.

WE "*shall build the old wastes...*"

Paul speaks to us of that mystery in his letter to Timothy:

*And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the **world**, received up into glory.* (1Tim 3:16)

Whether this world continues on unto eternity, I know not. But its present condition is surely not abiding. *Our* world, however, is enduring forever.

God's people were promised through Isaiah "beauty for ashes". Ashes was a term synonymous with mourning, and "heaviness," as Isaiah puts it. Thus the "oil of joy" is given unto us—the promise of eternal deliverance, and the assurance of a *literal redemption* of the earth itself, however that manifests... That Christ's rule will continue into all eternity, and His—and our—enemies will cease to exist.

The word *beauty*, in the Hebrew is from [twelve words](#). I find that significant... It is found translated for us 49 times—all in the Old Testament. Curiously, there is no word found for 'beauty' in the New Testament Greek, and only one time can I find a similar sentiment (speaking in the human sense, as opposed to God's "glory")—here in 1 Peter 3:3...

*"Whose **adorning** let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel."*

Even more interesting is that the word used for "adorning" is the Greek, *kosmos*—translated in *every other* of the 186 times it's found, as 'WORLD'. Strong's first definition of the word is as follows:

Kosmos- *I. an apt and harmonious arrangement or constitution, order, government.*

This is the where the Old Covenant "*beauty*" and the New Covenant "*world*" intersect.

In our time, believers in Christ—those not only seeking and knocking, but "*pressing into the Kingdom of God*"—are at a crossroads. We do not witness a world of beauty, but quite the contrary. The world in which we live is FAR from an "apt and harmonious arrangement," rather

disharmony, ungodliness, and an absolute inversion of good and evil. Nevertheless, the *kosmos* Yahweh created IS that proper definition of Strong's, but because we've not seen it "on earth as it is in heaven," we become despondent and can easily be overwhelmed in this human experience. Driven like cattle, our souls are vexed by the wickedness around us and the governments of men under which we live. We mourn as well, and yearn for the redemption of these things.

It is imperative that we stay focused on our King and His abiding love for us—especially in this time of world-wide madness. Lest we find ourselves as the Psalmist did, whose "feet were almost gone..."

"Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." (Psalm 73)

Never lose sight of the first FACT cited in that passage... Rotherham translates it, ***Nothing but good is God unto Israel*** (also see Deut 6:24, Rom 8:28). He is always working for our good, never for our evil. Every hardship, persecution, personal or financial damage done unto us was *created by God for our benefit*. We, of course, in the moment won't always feel this way, but that is why He gives us faith. He's given us His very *Word* on it, and we know His character...

The Psalmist continues:

"They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment... And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches."

All of us are eyewitnesses to this. We watch in disbelief as our countrymen—those lower strata of citizenry—literally burn their cities down, drunk on rage and robbery, in an orgy of violence. Meanwhile the power elite conspire together with their great hoard of wealth to destroy whole economies for the stated goal of "depopulating" the earth. This has been our experience, just as it was for our brethren in those ancient times. Thusly did Jeremiah mourn, and pleaded with Yahweh:

"Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins." (Jeremiah 12)

That's us in the (nominal) Christian West—"signaling" virtue as a form of godliness while keeping Yahweh "far from their reins"... *We* make our own rules; *we* choose our own paths.

Yet both Jeremiah and the Psalmist knew that the question was self-resolved...one simply reads on to finish the chapter to see the end of the wicked.

But for us, our God has something far greater in mind...

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make

up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.” (Malachi 3)

God is recreating the world... “And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.” It is a world in which justice and judgement shall reign eternal. The ever-increasing beauty of the *kosmos* will be manifested in the “harmonious arrangement of order” in the government of Christ. THIS is the Covenant into which we have entered with our God, and WE are the vessels He has chosen to create with. Just as Peter was once that ‘little stone’, yet would his new name become one of the **“twelve foundations”** of the walls of New Jerusalem (Rev 21:14).

But friends, that creation will come with the tears and the blood of the saints. Our King has called us to “take up our cross and follow him”. We must be willing to suffer for His sake—and we mustn’t be surprised when it comes. We are *witnesses* against the wicked. Therefore the beauty and harmony we long for compels us to see the ugliness which contrasts it. It is the ugliness of a godless world, a world made by rebellious men and women who have enshrined lawlessness and seem to prosper in their ways. But God is not blind to this, nor is he “without knowledge of it”. I assure you, He knows what He is doing and we must “trust the Plan”. Our enemies only seem to be winning, but it is a setup. It is a trap they are building for themselves and we’d best ignore their temporary prosperity—even shun it at times—“that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.” (Rev 18:4).

It may be a particularly difficult time to take joy in our sufferings, and following our conscience may one day cost us everything in this life. Rest assured, however, [Christ directly addressed](#) this, and the reward He has personally guaranteed. Furthermore, we are BLESSED for it, and by it are we freed and made truly alive.

“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted...Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” (Matt 5)

Beauty without ashes just isn’t possible. And it is only the broken-hearted who ultimately find liberty.