

Beauty for Ashes

Text: Isaiah 61:1-3

“To grant [consolation and joy] to those who mourn in Zion--to give them an ornament (a garland or diadem) of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, the garment [expressive] of praise instead of a heavy, burdened, and failing spirit--that they may be called oaks of righteousness [lofty, strong, and magnificent, distinguished for uprightness, justice, and right standing with God], the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified. “ (Isa. 61:3 AMP)

Who are those in Zion? Us, the church, you and me, this verse is God’s promise to us that His name may be glorified. God wants to turn around every situation in our lives that looks like one of shame or reproach into one that glorifies Him. He wants us to trade our sorrows and our shame for beauty.

An example of a shameful circumstance can be found in John 11. Two sisters, Mary and Martha had called for Jesus to come and heal their brother Lazarus who was sick. Jesus did not come immediately, rather He waited for a few days by which time Lazarus had died. We can imagine the shame that the sisters would have felt in their community. It seemed that Jesus had failed them, no doubt they had told all their friends and neighbours not to worry because Jesus would come and heal their brother.

There are times in all of our lives that things appear to be just like that.

- Things appear to be dead.
- It appears to be over.
- It appears that God has turned a deaf ear to you and your cry.
- Your dreams are dead.
- It looks like God has forgotten about you.
- You are desperate for an answer but no answer has come.
- You feel like it is too late for God to do anything concerning your situation
- .You feel just like Martha did when her brother died – you’re too late God!
- You cry out, “God where are you?” But the wind picks up your cry and slaps it back in your face again.

Is that where you are now? Just like in the situation of Lazarus there will be a resurrection in your life in Jesus name. The story wasn’t over; God still glorified Himself, in an even greater way than He could have if Jesus had come while Lazarus was ill. Jesus came and resurrected Lazarus from the dead. The people had seen healing before but they had never seen a man raised from the dead after four days. As a result many became followers of Jesus that day. God will never let His name or those who hope in His name to be put to shame (Ps. 25:3). In the end God will always glorify Himself.

What is that dead situation you are facing, one where it looks like the story is over? It is not over until God is glorified. From my experience, the greater your problem, the greater your testimony will be.

Another situation in the Bible that was turned around from shame to glory can be found in the story of the Shunammite woman. (2 Kings 4:8-37) This was a wise woman, she had perceived that Elisha was a man of God and so anytime he passed by, she accommodated him. The man of God was so blessed that he sent his servant to ask her what could be done for her, and it transpired that she had no son, so Elisha prophesied that she would have a son in a year’s time. Sure enough after a year this miracle baby was born. However, later the child died (v18). Here she found herself in a situation of shame, the miracle baby that she would have testified of to all her friends and anyone who would listen had now died. However, her reaction is amazing and challenging (v21-23). There are two important points that can be noted from her response.

Firstly it is necessary to watch your tongue. Even though her son was dead, all she would say is ‘It shall be well’ (v23). That is how we should be, no matter how dark the situation may seem, we must speak faith filled words that will lead to our upliftment not our destruction. (Prov. 18:21; 2 Cor. 10:4-5). Each time a thought comes to our mind that does not agree with the Word, we must confess the truth out loud to see victory.

Another aspect to be noted is that she had strong, unshakeable faith. She knew that if she could just get to Elisha, God's representative, then her son would be resurrected. She knew that the same God who gave her the son, could restore him. God had already proved Himself to be a miracle worker in her life so why couldn't He do it again. Has God ever turned your problems into testimonies before? Then have faith He will do it again (Heb. 13:8).

All that is left for us is to believe in faith and keep believing no matter how it may look. It is time to leave worthless things behind -- weights and unnecessary burdens, and thoughts that have hindered you as they make their continuous cycle in your mind. Let's grow upward into our next level of expression of His potential within us. It is time to break-free from our fears, insecurities, apprehensions, the false evidence appearing real (fear), etc. We find ourselves carrying around negative, false conclusions about ourselves. They can become a great weight and a burden. We are to lay weights and burdens aside (Heb. 12:1. Deut. 28:1)

Let us believe today that whatever God's hands touch becomes beautiful. An encounter with Him and you will never be the same again. Make a commitment to seek Him like never before and as you encounter Him, every situation in your life will be turned around to glorify Him.

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