

## HOPE GIVERS: PT 3. HOPE GIVERS

Last week I talked about great oaks. Apology to make. Said that oaks can grow up to 8 metres diameter. Not right. 8.5 feet!! 😊

Isaiah 61:3 To all who mourn in Israel, he will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the LORD has planted for his own glory.

Who is the He? And who is He talking about? He is Jesus Christ and it is talking about us. It is easy to look at a passage like this and say; How is this possible? Esp. when life is tough. How can we live this out in reality? So I approach this passage with a sense of trepidation. And how do I speak into this passage when I am aware of the reality of what some of you are walking through right now.

**Beauty for Ashes** Ashes were a symbols of mourning in the ancient world. Ashes are a reminder of our death, our mortality. We are made from dust and return to dust. They are connected to mourning over sin.

The promise is that of beauty. There is a human hunger with in us for beauty; art, landscapes, architecture, But we know that our striving for beauty is often superficial. And we know that when we look in the mirror we are disappointed at what we see inside our selves as well. We don't want to feel ugly so we put a lot of effort into looking good on the outside. What does the Bible say about this longing for beauty?

God is beautiful. Ps 27:4 Zec 9:16-17 God surrounds himself with beauty. Ps 96:5-6. But our human efforts towards beauty only create ashes. Our cultures answer to this longing for beauty has been to create an obsession with what we look like, ignoring our emotional and spiritual wellbeing. This passion has led to a burning out of something good and leaving us a pile of ashes.

And when we have exhausted all of our efforts to be beautiful, and are left with nothing but a pile of ashes, God steps in with the redemptive plan of His Son not simply to make us beautiful, but to exchange those worthless ashes for His beauty. . But instead of it being the temporary beauty that we thought we were after, He gives us His very eternal beauty. He makes us

beautiful so that we can display God's beauty to the rest of creation. God places his beauty within us. I Peter 3:3-4, Can we come to the place of contentment that our primary concern is an inner beauty? Or are we still more concerned with how other people see us. Some people radiate an inner beauty, it shines from us. Christ changes us.

When we know what God has done, we will feel wanted. We will know that God delights in us, sings over us. God surrounds himself with beauty. That is us. We are beautiful in his eyes Psalm 149:4 And when we get in our heads that God takes pleasure in us it fundamentally changes how we interact with Him and with other people.

On an island in the Pacific lived a woman name Sarita who all the other Islanders agreed was quite plain and lacked any of the social graces expected of women on this island. She was (in the eyes of the Islanders and even her own father) not likely to marry because she was a woman without worth. Then one day a man named Johnny Lingo appeared and offered her father the unheard sum of 8 cows to marry Sarita. The Islanders were shocked because no one had ever paid more than 5 or 6 cows for a wife – not even for the most valuable women of the island! Johnny, however, paid the 8 cows and took his new wife home to his own island. Months later a visitor to the islands heard the story and decided to visit the couple. To his surprise he met Sarita and found her to be stunningly beautiful and one of the most graceful women he had ever seen. Confused, he asked Johnny why his wife seemed to be so different than the other island woman had described to him. Johnny's answer was simple: the change was because she was an 8 cow wife now.

Made up story. Lots of criticism of its sexism. But there is a core Biblical truth to is. Beauty will radiate from us when we truly know how much we are loved and valued by God.

**Joy instead of mourning.** Some have used this to suggest we should not grieve. Somehow funerals should be happy. Denying our God given emotions is a very dangerous idea. Yet Paul says Rejoice in the Lord always.

Yet Paul had been beaten numerous times, received thirty nine lashes, been shipwrecked, left for dead, imprisoned, deserted by friends, and gone without food, shelter. Body was probably half crippled, bent



from all of this. There was a good chance he was half-blind as well. Now he is in prison, awaiting trial from Nero, who loved killing Christians. He is carrying the weight of the new churches he had planted. There was in-fighting, and false teachers. Yet he writes the book of Philippians, a book of joy.

He is not calling us to be always happy. Not a feeling but a decision. Joy can be found in Jesus Christ. There is a joy that comes from the confidence that God exists, that God is in control and that God is good. It is summed up in a deep belief in the sovereignty of God. This is a central pillar of belief for Paul. Out of our core beliefs come our behaviour. Our anxiety comes from the idea that the world is chaotic, and that we are victims of random forces.

Study from WW2. Studied soldiers in combat vs fighter pilots. Despite 50% of pilots dying in action, 93% claimed they were happy. The difference was that pilots felt they were in control, while soldiers felt they had no control. Perceived control creates calm. Lack of control breeds fear. So one way people try to control anxiety is by controlling everything in their life. But the more you try to control your world, the more you realize you can't. Paul's answer was to relinquish control to God. His joy was found in God's sovereignty. So he saw his imprisonment had helped the gospel cause. Everything is under God's control.

Our mourning, our grief, our despair, our anxiety will decrease as we focus on the sovereignty of God. He is the creator who is blessed forever. Rom 1:25 He is the same yesterday, today and forever. Heb 13:8 He has a million angels at his disposal. Every crown is paper mache one compared to his. He has no advisors. He reports to no one. He is in change. Jer. 17:7-8 says the person who trusts in the Lord has deep roots and is not anxious in trouble.

**Festive praise instead of despair.** Some translations say "the Garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." With ashes of mourning went a garment of sackcloth. This is a picture of contrast. Sitting in sackcloth and ashes in mourning, in dancing at a party in bright clothes.

The concept of robes or garments is found a few times in the Bible. Is 61:10 Zec 2:4 Rev 19:8 It is the idea of God exchanging our old filthy clothes with new ones of salvation and righteousness.

Praise is a powerful thing. Thankfulness changes hearts and renews minds. David repeatedly chose praise in the midst of difficult and trying circumstances. Paul drew his strength from God by praising His name and

remembering His faithfulness in all things. Even while in prison, Paul and Silas chose to praise God in song instead of wallowing in their misery.

Praise and thanksgiving in a sense are simply the declaring of truth. When we praise God we are declaring he is in control. When we give thanks to God, we are saying that all we have comes from him. We are speaking out truth, and as we do that we are also defeating the lies that pull us down. Lies like, "God does not care." "You are weak." "Things are out of control." Despair cannot live in such an environment of praise and thanksgiving.

However, we have to choose to put that garment on. Heb. 13:15 calls praise a "sacrifice." It is a choice we make, even when it is hard. In him is our strength, our peace, our joy, even in hardship.

This series is called Hope givers. We are to be hope givers because of what Jesus Christ has done. It is not that we can give hope. But we can point to the one who can. That hope is not fully realized. One day there will be no ashes. No sin-filled world. One day there will be no mourning. No death, disease, tragedy. One day there will be no despair. World will be as it should be. We live with the tension. We know a measure of beauty. We know a measure of joy. We see a little of God. But all of us fall back into superficially and anxiety, and despair. And yet Jesus' death and resurrection is the promise that one day all things will be put right.

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## REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. What kind of beauty do you feel drawn to? How is that beauty a reflection in some way of God?
2. Has there been "ashes" in your life that God has made beautiful?
3. Discuss the Jonny Lingo story. In what ways do you subconsciously value yourself?
4. Do you know anyone that radiates an "inner beauty" that is very noticeable?
5. What is your reaction to the command to "rejoice in the Lord always"?
6. How can we be emotionally authentic and yet joyful at the same time?
7. What hinders us putting on the garment of praise?
8. In what practical ways can we give hope to others in tough times?



**CENTRAL BAPTIST**

LOVE GOD : LOVE OTHERS