

No Beauty That It Should Be Desired

By R.T. Nusbaum

If we really accept the Cross that Jesus spoke of to His followers, it must mean death for us in forms we may not have imagined. When we think of the Cross being applied to our lives we usually think in terms of the loss of things. Our perception is that it involves giving up some *thing*. But when Isaiah presented the Cross, he showed that one of the things that Jesus suffered was the loss of beauty. Few consider the possibility of the loss of beauty and its effect in terms of being acceptable to men. Beauty, as understood here, is that outward presentation of ourselves that gives us favor in the eyes of others. This may be anything from our personal physical appearance to presenting a pleasing personality. It could also include how our reputation is presented before men.

Jesus let us know that following Him in the Cross would be like a seed falling into the ground and dying (John 12:24). The elements of this world take its toll on the outward husk of the seed where only what is within becomes valuable. The outward display disintegrates. All things about us that appeared admirable are surrendered for the true power of God. Philippians tells us that Jesus made Himself of no reputation outwardly but only accomplished any true spiritual work by means of death. This loss of exterior beauty must be reckoned upon as part of what it means to embrace the Cross. At the Cross, all that you had gained based on your own personal attractiveness is done away. If anyone accepts or honors you, it will now be based solely on what Jesus allows. If He does not open the door to favor then you are content to "abide alone". One who has entered into such things with the Lord no longer is concerned about becoming attractive to those around him. His only concern is to please the Father.

Now this process of giving up the outward as a means of favor and acceptance may be perceived as a glorious surrender however, it is not. It is a painstaking event. It is the Cross! Instead of us gloriously submitting these things up to God, men come and mar them. We become despised and rejected by men, even as Jesus was.

Beauty For Ashes

What is the meaning of ashes? It is when God reduces all our beauty, acceptance, ambitions and ministry down to nothing in the eyes of men so that we find acceptance only from God. Let me make it clear that the things of which we are speaking concern the Cross and the altar. In Old Testament times, when someone came to offer unto God, fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice that was placed upon the altar. The end result of this was that the sacrifice was reduced to ashes. Most of the emphasis today is only on one aspect of ashes: that God gives us beauty for ashes. This scripture is so popular because men seek beauty and outward acceptance. However, the beauty spoken of in this scripture may not be one that gives us wider acceptance in the world OR in the religious community. It may only be a beauty that satisfies the Lord's heart alone.

And even our concept concerning the meaning of "ashes" may be lacking. Not only that but, we may want to receive beauty for ashes but how many of us have truly been reduced to ashes yet? Sure, we have gone through trials and sufferings but have we truly come to ashes yet? Ashes are the smallest form a substance can be reduced to without losing all trace of it. I know that we have gone through many things but few of us have truly come to ashes as of yet. I fear that too much of our lives and our flesh remain untouched by the fire of the altar.

Again, another consideration is that, how do we know if the fire consuming all flesh and leaving only ashes of us is not to be understood in a sacrificial way as beautiful unto God? What I am saying is that, real beauty to God may actually be the loss of personally beauty and being brought to ashes. If we are to grow greater in the Lord then surely that will mean loss to us. "He must increase but I must decrease" (John 1: 30). The fire of God is specifically devised, not for the sinner and rebellious man but to consume every part of that life that is yielded to Him on the altar. Fire is meant for the sacrificed not for the unwilling. Reduction to ashes in this case may not be considered disastrous to the Lord but beautiful. If one is truly reduced to ashes, he is dead to the need to appear beautiful before the eyes of men. A death to one form of beauty has been replaced by another form of beauty.

Every day you see Christian service being carried out but you see very little of ashes. The average concept of Christian consecration does not require an altar. Besides this, consecration is not exclusive to Christianity. You find people in the work place all over the world who give up their time, money, family time and recreation time because they are highly dedicated to their jobs. But this kind of consecration does not require that a person come to a place where "there is no beauty that we should desire it." In truth, many are so deeply involved in the church because they seek an acceptance among men. The underlying motive behind that is selfishness. But Jesus said every man that follows Him is to "deny himself and take up his cross". This is the only consecration that is acceptable to God. God accepted no Old Testament sacrifice unless it was consumed by fire on the altar. Those will find that being turned into ashes is as acceptable thing.

We Perceive the Altar To Be the Work Of the Devil

The work of the fire on the altar may not be fun but it is done with purpose. Only those who perceive the purpose of God will allow themselves to be tied to the horns of the altar (Ps. 118:27). If our only thought is that the devil is attacking us, we will miss the grand purpose. We will resist what God is doing in order to retain our beauty. Men become stubborn, resistant and ugly, all to maintain a proper appearance before men. Our efforts and strength begin to be marshaled in favor of "saving face". It is hard for man to comprehend that God is working to remove all that has made us acceptable in the natural in order to make Christ our only basis of acceptance.

But why is it hard for Christians to comprehend this work of God? At new birth we are made one with Jesus. He said that if they rejected Him, they will reject us, did He not? All Christians know and sing that the Cross is the "emblem of suffering and shame". But

if these things are understood then why are Christians seeking to be accepted and popular in this world? If people accept us it should only be because Christ gives us that favor and that only happens because we have accepted the altar and not because we have rejected it. The Apostle Paul declares that we have been crucified unto the world and the world crucified unto us (Galatians 6:14). If this is true then who cares for the acceptance of the world?

To embrace the truth of ashes is the acceptance of only relying on the acceptance granted by God. If favor comes, it is by His choice alone. Then, when you find those with whom the Lord has given acceptance there is deep gratitude at work within you. There is also the development of a life-style that only lives off of what the hand of the Lord provides and it does so with contentment. In the eyes of the Lord, THIS is true beauty for ashes.

Sadly, there are too many who are unwilling to accept such beauty. They have many educational qualifications, influential friends and possess many gifts and talents, but all these are the things that must be removed if we are ever to shine forth the beauty of Christ as our only beauty. When we are willing to give up the "things that are GAIN to us" then we will be content with "whom have I in heaven but thee and what desires do I have in the earth but thee." Until we have been brought to ashes this will remain simply a beautiful verse but not an actual reality in our lives.

Reduce Jesus To Ashes – Bring Me To Beauty

The problem is that many are more than eager for Jesus to be marred as long as it brings US into greater beauty. He became marred and scarred that the Church's spots and blemishes might be removed. Because of His work on the Cross for us, Jesus will live forever pierced and appear as a slain Lamb but believers will appear as a spotless Bride, without blemish. While this is cause for great rejoicing on our behalf, let us never forget that Lucifer fell by reason of his beauty.

We also face similar dangers for, as our beauty proceeds and as our transformation comes about, we may find ourselves repelled by the slain Lamb. Consider the example of the Shulamite woman (who represents the Bride of Christ) in the Song of Solomon. The King had taken her from one who was "black" and was rejected to one who "dripped with" beauty (Song Of Solomon 5:3&5). The beauty He had brought her into caused her to become so occupied with maintaining her own beauty that she refused to "unbeautify" herself in order to let Him in with her. Therefore, the true Beauty (Jesus Christ) was withdrawn from her and she was left to ponder what true beauty really consists of. By reason of our own ugliness we seek beauty for ashes from the Lord. Therefore holiness and becoming without spot may become the goal instead of Christ. If this becomes the case then Jesus simply becomes a tool or means to our goal and He becomes secondary. Beauty for ashes is not found in becoming more beautiful than Him but in becoming one with His Lamb nature. The Lamb may be despised and rejected of men but it is beautiful to the Father.

Understanding Beauty From God's Perspective

The danger lies, not in the fact of the possession of beauty but that her beauty (the Church and the Shulamite) was never meant to be admired by her own eyes but was for Him alone. This same situation is what caused the fall of Lucifer. As long as God called him "the anointed cherub" and spoke of his beauty, things were fine. But Lucifer became Satan when he started noticing his own beauty and took his eyes off the beauty of the Lord. He may have still led praise and worship but it was now all for himself and no longer for the Lord. (I realize that some may not apply this scriptures to the devil and also see no proof that he led the worship in heaven. However, the principle that is being applied to these scriptures yet remains true, even if misapplied).

The pursuit for beauty is not just something that is confined to the human condition. Many are ready to leave the "uncomely" path of the Cross for more beautiful conditions of living or ministry. The Prophet Elijah was headed toward the Jordan where "death and resurrection" would take place. All the other prophets knew that this would be the day their "master would be taken from them." They all remained in the beauty and safety of their "schools of the prophets" while Elijah headed toward the Cross. However, Elisha would not leave Elijah's side. He was consistently offered the more beautiful opportunity of staying with the prophets but he refused. He went all the way, even following him through the depths of the river of death called Jordan.

But what of the prophets and what of us? We leave Elijah and His journey toward death and trade it for the beauty among the sons of the prophets. If we don't know what true beauty is then there is the possibility that we will use Him for our own perfection then, like Israel, we will become corrupted by reason of our beauty (Duet. 8:7-17).

The true beauty that is given for ashes comes out of ashes. It is a beauty based on the loss of all personal acceptableness. It finds its beauty in another. The beauty of the Lamb is not seen in its outward appearance but in His nature. Outwardly, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. If earth beauty is the kind of beauty that we seek then the inevitable result will be that we will "hide as it were our faces from Him". But if we have comprehended the beauty of the Lamb nature, then the beauty we have received out of ashes will be one that looks like Him. We will no longer lay hold of the scripture that says He gives us "beauty for ashes" for personal gain and greater acceptance in the world or religious community. We will be content that, having been reduced to ashes, we are now identified with the Lamb and, for us, there can be no greater beauty in the whole universe. ***