

THE BEAUTY OF THE LORD

"And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." Psalm 90:17.

People in general, and women in particular, want to be beautiful. Millions of dollars are spent annually for cosmetics, beauty preparations and beauty treatments.

But this prayer of Moses, the man of God, was not for such physical beauty. The loveliness which he had in mind cannot be obtained in a beauty parlor, at a cosmetics counter, or through beauty preparations. It is the gift of God upon the soul. So, then, our text is the cry of the mortal for the beauty of the Eternal -- the beauty and loveliness of God Himself.

In his last illness Charles Kingsley was overheard murmuring quietly to himself, "How beautiful God is! How beautiful God is!"

Moses entreated that the beauty of the Lord might be upon him. His prayer was answered, perhaps when he least expected it, for when he came down from the mountain from forty days and forty nights of fellowship with God his face shone, as though already the beauty of the Lord his God had fallen upon every feature; indeed, he did not discover it until he found people getting away from him, and he turned to Aaron and said, "The people avoid me. What has happened, and why?" Aaron answered, "Brother, the reason is that your face is all alight with something we have never seen on it before." Moses' prayer had been answered, though he wist it not. The important thing in your life and mine is to seek an unconscious beauty which everybody else shall see in us but ourselves, an unconsciousness of likeness to our Lord.

There are two qualities which blended together create the ineffable beauty of the Almighty. They are God's holiness and God's grace. There cannot be any moral beauty without holiness. When a man's life is smeared and smudged with sin, the beauty of his character is gone. The quality of holiness is a permanent element in the beauty of the Lord.

The word "beauty" carries with it the suggestion of charm. It is winsome and attractive. It does more than command our admiration; it constrains our love. But holiness alone would scarcely constrain our love; instead, it causes us to cry out as did Isaiah, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (6:5). Unless grace, the opposite quality of God's beauty, intermingles with righteousness, we lose the impression of the divine beauty. John mentions it in the statement, "And we behold his glory, the glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace." It was this characteristic of Christ Jesus that gave Him His charm. Consequently, "The common people heard him gladly." It was His love that drew them.

When praying, Moses asked that the divine beauty and glory might become the possession of all God's children. "The beauty of the Lord our God" is a singular expression, but it represents the most beautiful of all the beauty in the whole world. The singular thing about this beauty is that it may be ours -- yours and mine; it may be "upon us." A famous novelist had one of her characters say to another, "I have seen God in you." The beauty of the Lord should be reflected in God's children just as the beauty of the sky is reflected in a placid lake.

This beauty is varied. It is the beauty of faith as seen in Abraham, the beauty of patience as seen in Job, the beauty of purity as seen in Joseph, the beauty of meekness as seen in Moses, the beauty of boldness as seen in Elijah, the beauty of thankfulness as seen in David, the beauty of faithfulness as seen in Daniel, the beauty of earnestness as seen in Paul, the beauty of love as seen in John, and the beauty of them all and more besides as seen in Jesus Christ. The beauty of the Lord will defy all the ravages of time, care, disease and death.

This beauty is attractive. The beauty of the Lord upon the early Christians drew the eyes of the heathen toward them, and forced from them the exclamation, "Behold these Christians, how they love one another." The beauty of God upon the disciples caused the people around to wonder, and take "knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." The one who is invested with the beauty of the Lord is unconscious both of the existence of that beauty and the admiration it excites in the minds of those who gaze upon it.

Let me point out four things about the beauty of the Lord our God!

I. This Beauty Should Be Sought.

Note the words of this prayer: "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." If we pray at all, we pray for many things; but I wonder if you have ever prayed this prayer -- "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us"? Has it ever entered into your mind and heart that this is something that God wants you to seek? This beauty should be sought for two reasons.

1. It is in the purpose of God.

"He will beautify the meek with salvation" (Psalm 149:4). That is to say, it is in the purpose of God that your life and mine should be marked by sheer beauty of character. If it is in the purpose of God that He will beautify the meek with salvation, then surely it should be in our prayers. We must not conceive of the purpose of God only in terms of the orthodoxy of our faith, but also in the Christlikeness of our lives. Have you ever prayed for beauty of character? Have you ever asked for loveliness of life?

2. It is the person of our Lord.

"Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." If there is any beauty in the Lord, and if that Lord be in me, then surely the beauty should be seen in action.

II. This Beauty Can Be Lost.

One of the choicest names that was given to the city of Jerusalem was "the perfection of beauty." What a lovely name! But the day came when, concerning that very city, the Word of God had to record that "all her beauty is departed." So beauty is something that can be lost. And it may be that what God wants some professing Christians to learn is how unlovely they have become and are. Has there been a deterioration and a disintegration of that which was once sweet and lovely in your life? If so, the beauty has departed.

Beauty is sometimes lost through deception. Some have thought that beauty could be found where there was not any. What was thought to be beauty was but the mirage of temptation. We live in days when sin is condoned and glamorized in the press, on the television screen, in the realm of art and in the name of culture. But wherever it is made to appear attractive and

lovely in reality and in life, it is deceiving when presented thus.

III. This Beauty Can Be Found.

1. It may be found at a price.

The Psalmist said, "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (96:9). How familiar we are with the words, "the beauty of holiness," but how ignorant we are of the truth. What is the root meaning of holiness in the Old Testament? It means separation, or separateness. Separation from what? From everything that is out of harmony with the mind and character and will of God. Separateness from sin is the kind of beauty, the quality of beauty that God offers to us. Apart from a separateness from sin there is no beauty.

There is no loveliness in sin. Take any word that you like out of your vocabulary that describes a kind of sin, and it is not a beautiful word, but an ugly one. Have you ever seen a beautiful temper? Have you ever heard of a beautiful gossip? Have you ever seen a person who was unkind to others and looking beautiful? Have you ever seen a person taking offense and looking beautiful? Is jealousy ever lovely and beautiful? Is unfaithfulness ever beautiful? That may be a lovely thing on the screen, but it is an ugly thing in the home.

All sin is ugly, even though it may be painted in the most glowing colors, and although the devil may try to deceive us into thinking it is beautiful. Beauty is to be found at a price. The only beauty that God offers is the beauty of holiness, a beauty which knows a separateness from sin, and a willingness to be done with it.

2. It may be found in a place.

God's Word says, "Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary" (Psalm 96:6). It is in the secret or innermost place that one can behold the beauty of the Lord. As one dwells there and comes to understand the mind of Christ, and brings it bear on his own life, then, as the New Testament states it, "I am transfigured by the Spirit of the Lord in ever-increasing splendor into his own image."

IV. This Beauty Will Be Seen.

As to this visible evidence two things may be said.

1. It will be distinctive.

"They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." Has anybody taken knowledge that you have been with Him? Does anybody know Christ as Saviour because you personally won him or her? Such beauty is something distinctive, unique, arresting and demands an explanation in terms of God.

2. It will be attractive.

It will be unconsciously attractive, for "Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone." There will be a shining forth of the inner glory of the living Christ. Concerning Christ it was written, "They came to Him." He never invited them to come, or chased after them. They came!

Have you personally drawn anybody to Christ? There is no use to say you are a Christian if Christ cannot be seen in you.