

We’re in our 3rd week of the series “There’s Work To Be Done”

We’re looking ways in which our relationship with God
ought to transform the way that we think about our work
...whatever that work is...our vocational work,
our work with our families, our work in our communities.
How should we think differently about the work we are called to do
in light of our relationship with God?

We have been looking at aspects of God’s character,
and recognizing that these are, of course,
also values of His kingdom.

When Jesus teaches us to pray,
“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”,
implicit in that is a call partner with God in bringing His Kingdom
...to participate in God’s work of redemption in the world,
bringing it back into alignment with God’s plan.

God’s kingdom is wherever God rules and reigns.
It is that which is under God’s leadership.
Heaven is a fully renewed and restored earth
...operating in every way as God designed it.

So, when Jesus teaches us to pray,
“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”,
Jesus is saying...pray for God’s kingdom to come NOW!
...into this broken world.
For earth to resemble what heaven will be like...NOW
The call to pray for His kingdom to come is also
a call to partner with God in bringing His kingdom
...to be kingdom bringers!

This is the point of this series.

The question being raised is this:

“Do you recognize that your vocational work can be
a partnership with God
...participating in His redemptive work in the world!!

Do we see that there is in fact no separation between our life as a Christian,
and the work we do for our vocation.

*(Monday through Friday has as much to do
with our relationship with God as Sunday!
There should be no break...no interruption.)*

You might think, when I'm sharing my faith with someone,
or serving at one of our Food Pantries,
or helping out with our Matthew Homes projects,
or teaching Sunday School in our Lighthouse ministry,
 THAT'S when I'm partnering with God in
 His work of redemption in the world.
 NOT when I'm working at Home Depot.

So, in week 1,

Ben Dockery helped us to see "goodness" as a value of God's kingdom.
And he cast a vision for us to view our work
as bringing goodness into the world.
To see our work as producing good things
 ...good products, good environments, good services,
work that brings blessing,
blessings that come from goodness.

Last week,

Pastor Mike reminded us of God's justice.
We have a just God, so justice is a value of the Kingdom of God.
He said that because God is concerned for justice
 ...because God works to bring justice
 ...we need to do the same.
Mike challenged us to consider ways that our work can be used to
partner with God in bringing justice into the world
 ...to make our world more just...as it is in heaven.

Today our theme is "Beauty".

We're looking at beauty as an aspect of God's character,
and therefore a value in His kingdom.
And we're considering ways that we might
bring that value of the kingdom of God into the world.

So first we're going to define...what do we mean by "beauty"

Then we're going to look at beauty as a characteristic of our God
And finally, we're going to think about how we can
bring beauty, as a value of the kingdom of God into the world

So first, what is beauty? It's important here to stress that we're talking about beauty as a value
in the kingdom of God, where God and His ways rule and reign.

Because there is a certain kind of cosmetic beauty that certainly is
a value where sin rules and reigns.
 ...what the Bible calls, "the system of this world"

There, beauty is used as a tool for personal gain, for self advancement
We all know of people who are famous for being famous.

People who have used cosmetic beauty,
and surrounded themselves with
things that the world's system might lift up as beautiful
...but this is not what we're talking about this morning.

In fact, there is nothing beautiful about
any value of the Kingdom of God being
used for personal advancement.
That is the opposite of beauty.
We're not talking about surface, cosmetic beauty
...but something deeper, more resonant.

So what is beauty?

Earlier this morning, you were asked to share the most beautiful place you had ever seen.

And my guess is that you didn't have a hard time thinking of
a moment when you experienced beauty.

Now, if we had asked you to greet one another and
share with each other the definition of beauty,
you may have had a harder time.

Beauty is extremely difficult to define.

But all of us know of its existence
...all of us have experienced it
...all of us have had profound moments of sublimity
...deep aesthetic experiences with the sublime.

A friend of mine described an experience on a trip to the Grand Canyon.

She and her husband arrived, parked and got out of their cars
and just stood at the edge of the canyon.
They stood for several minutes without saying a word.
After a while, they looked at each other,
and both of them had tears streaming down their face.

What is it that causes us to look at a rock and cry?!

It's clear, there is something deep in us that responds to beauty.

We are wired to respond to deep aesthetic experiences

This is what we're talking about this morning

...these deep resonant, sensory, profoundly satisfying, pleasing experiences

We've all experienced those moments

...in nature, or with man-made objects of creativity

With a painting, a piece of music,
a film, with beautiful architecture,

Beauty is a quality that has no utilitarian purpose, no practical use...it just is beautiful

But there is something right and good about beauty.

And part of why these experiences feel right and good is that beauty is a characteristic of our creator.

I loved Ben's point in week 1 that the first thing we see God doing is working. "In the beginning God created..." And after each stage of creation, what did God say? "It is good" He proclaimed the goodness of what He had made. But He could have just as easily said, "It is beautiful". Everything He touches is filled with beauty! He can't help it! Everything He makes is filled with grandeur and majesty, vastness and intricacy. (Beautiful, coordinated, sustaining system that works together in a beautiful rhythm and with remarkable precision.)

The universe doesn't need to be that beautiful,
that colorful, that varied, that inventive.
Just think about one category of species.

Let's just think for a moment of beetles.

There are beetles with strange, ridiculously varied designs.

Notice the designs of the coloration, stripes and spots.

Each one is a different shape!

Each one has different kinds on legs and armor and pincers.

There are 350,000 different species of beetles.

There are a huge variety of designs of fish.

But what blows me away are the fish at the bottom of the ocean...

My daughter Ella has raised butterflies since she was a little girl. There was an old fiery Cuban woman who lived next to the church, and had this enchanting, lush garden, filled with plants and flowers expressly designed to attract butterflies. And of course, for 5-year-old girls...this was an amazing sight. They always wanted to go over after church and look. And in that garden, she had an enclosure filled with Milkweed plants where she raised monarch butterflies. And...she taught Ella how to do it... (show pictures of the chrysalis.) Why does a chrysalis have to be that beautiful? What purpose do those gold beads serve? Why does the butterfly's wings need to be so intricately and beautifully patterned? There is no practical reason. There is just a sense of God's delight in making them that way...they are an absolute gift...a blessing.

Why is everything God touches beautiful?

What purpose does it serve? What benefit?

Beauty seems to serve no practical use...no utilitarian purpose.

But Paul tells us in Romans 1 that one thing it does is...it points us to God.

Romans 1:20 says:

²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.

And a few weeks ago, we looked at Ps. 19, where the psalmist proclaims "The Heavens are Telling of the glory of God, and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands"

The beauty of creation points us to the Creator. Why? Because the Creator is beautiful. Throughout the scriptures we see God described as beautiful. Beauty is one of the most fundamental character qualities of God.

1 Chronicles 16:29

²⁹ Give to the Lord the glory *due* His name;
Bring an offering, and come before Him.
Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!

Psalm 29:2

² Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name;
Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

Isaiah 4:2

In that day the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious;
And the fruit of the earth *shall be* excellent and appealing
For those of Israel who have escaped.

Isaiah 28:5

⁵ In that day the Lord of hosts will be
For a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty
To the remnant of His people,

Isaiah 33:17a

The Land of the Majestic King
¹⁷ Your eyes will see the King in His beauty;

Psalm 50:1-2

⁵⁰ The Mighty One, God the Lord,
Has spoken and called the earth
From the rising of the sun to its going down.
² Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God will shine forth.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts,

Today's Psalm speaks of the strength and the deep satisfaction, and the profound joy and peace that comes from experiencing God's beauty.

READ PSALM 27:1-8

Psalm 27:1-8

¹ The Lord is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?

² When the wicked advance against me
to devour^[a] me,

it is my enemies and my foes
who will stumble and fall.

³ Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then I will be confident.

⁴ One thing I ask from the Lord,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple.

⁵ For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.

⁶ Then my head will be exalted
above the enemies who surround me;
at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music to the Lord.

⁷ Hear my voice when I call, Lord;
be merciful to me and answer me.

⁸ My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"
Your face, Lord, I will seek.

Notice the context...the circumstances in which David writes the psalm.

- The wicked advance against me,
- an army besieges me,

-war is breaking out around me
David is writing in the midst of a dire situation.

But in the midst of all that, there is one thing David asks from the Lord,
one thing he seeks...to dwell in the house of the Lord and gaze on His beauty!

Think about this...if Beauty serves no practical useful purpose,
then why in the world is THIS the one thing David asks of the Lord!
Why not God's justice,
or His vengeance,
or His power and protection!
To say, the one thing I desire is to gaze on the beauty of God is to say,
the one thing I desire is God Himself
...not what He can do for me,
not some benefit or advantage I would have with God on my side.
He IS the benefit!
It's simply His presence, and to behold His beauty.

Vs. 8 says, "Lord, Your face will I seek".
The idea of seeking God's face is to seek His presence
...face to face presence.
We understand this right now,
after 2020, a year of sheltering in place and zoom calls.
We understand the power of face to face presence with people.
This is what David wanted above all else.

And what was the result?
Vs. 6 says, "Then my head will be lifted up."
In the midst of the most dire circumstances,
just to gaze at the beauty of the Lord,
just to be in face to face intimate fellowship with His presence
fills David with such hope, peace, and perspective,
he is able to hold his head up in the face of his enemies.

So is that the purpose of beauty?
To point us to God?
On one hand absolutely.
There is no beauty that can satisfy fully,
beyond the beauty of our God.
And the existence of beauty, our wiring to respond to it,
all points us to the one greatest source, and our greatest need.
But there is another sense in which beauty as a quality is simply a gift
...for pleasure, for joy, for enjoyment.
If you think about it, beauty has no practical use...utilitarian value.

It is valuable, simply because it is beautiful.

(Talk about taking Art History classes...there was a benefit to studying great art. I was getting a degree, and wanted to get a good grade. But sitting in a dark room looking at slides and learning dates was nothing like my first experience walking into an art museum, and standing in front of the actual works. (I grew up in rural Ohio BRYAN...dum dums, etch-a-sketch...no museums or galleries.)

Now, I actually pay every year to renew my membership to 3 art museums...just for the sheer pleasure of standing in front of these objects of beauty.)

Beauty is a non-utilitarian quality

...it doesn't really accomplish anything other than simply being beautiful.

It has its own intrinsic worth, value in and of itself

...without pointing to anything else. Beauty is valuable because it is beautiful.

Beauty is valuable, because it is an absolute gift from God.

A powerful force that lifts the soul, inspires us,
it pulls you from darkness

...from a broken world and gives hope.

I love the moment in The Two Towers when

Frodo and Sam are approaching mount doom

Frodo can't remember anything about their home in the Shire.

But Sam say, you have to remember to remind you
there is still beauty in this world.

I'm an adjunct professor at LFC in the fine art department. I often have students who are clearly artists, wildly gifted, but are hesitant to make that their area of study because it has not been supported and valued in their past. They think, "I need to do something useful, practical, I need to make a living!"

So, week 1, I have them imagine a world where only utilitarian considerations are taken into account. The only question is...does it work. Does it do what it is supposed to do? Does it accomplish something? Cars would only need to get us from point A to point B. Clothing merely needs to cover us, and keep us warm...protected from the elements. There would be no need for color, no need for music...the only books would be textbooks...books that disseminate information. There would be no need for poetry or narrative, no need for beautifully written stories.

Could we survive in a world like that? Yes. But would you want to live in a world like that? It would be joyless, dreary...it would be a lifeless existence.

What we do as artists is crucial. We bring life and joy and wonder into the world. We provide experiences with beauty...with this remarkable value of the kingdom of God.

CS. Lewis said this about friendship and art:

“Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art. It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival.”

Many of you have occupations that deal directly with aesthetics.

Artists, musicians, graphic designers,
interior designers, architects, landscape designers and maintainers,
chefs and restaurateurs,
furniture builders and furniture restorers.

These are roles dealing directly with an aspect of God’s character.

They are important for no other reason than
the fact that they bring this powerful quality into the world
...an experience of beauty.

You might be involved in that work simply because

you enjoyed it and found that you were good at it.

But I want to encourage you to think about your work differently.

You need to know that when Jesus invites us to partner with God
in bringing His kingdom into the world,
you are doing that

...you are bringing God’s Kingdom into this broken world!

You are producing a value of the kingdom of God
...a quality of the kingdom of God,
and characteristic of God Himself.

There is a reason why we look at a beautiful garden and

we want to linger, rest there, walk quietly through it.

There is a reason we pay for a deeply aesthetic experience
in a restaurant with someone we love,
and our engagement with that person is

enhanced and enriched by the environment, sites, smells, flavors.

There is a reason why the music of Bach, Beethoven,

Wagner or Debussy, Stravinsky or Bartok
transports us or soothes us or challenges us.

Or why the performance of your favorite band at the Chicago theater
etches a deep memory into your mind and body.

There is something intrinsically good and right, even righteous about beauty.

Some of you might be thinking,

“That’s nice, but I don’t have a job like that.

I’m not involved in bringing beauty into the world.”

...But I want to suggest that there is a sense in which
all of us have the opportunity to bring beauty into the world.

There is a famous saying...that beauty will save the world. It comes from
Fyodor Dostoevsky's book, "The Idiot"

(in which he attempted to create a
truly good and beautiful character without guile)

...later Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, in his acceptance speech for the
1970 Nobel prize in literature

made this phrase the theme of his acceptance speech.

Solzhenitsyn said that at first,
the phrase mystified him.

But in his later years, he had come to believe it is true.

But how could that be?

How can beauty save the world?

How can this quality that serves no practical purpose,
that does not accomplish anything outside of itself,
accomplish something that could possibly
be a source of some kind of salvation?

Let me tell you one way.

In Exodus 30, Bezalel was commissioned to

adorn the tabernacle with elements of craftsmanship and artistic design.

Most of these details serve no utilitarian function...no practical purpose.

They were merely for the beautification of the tabernacle.

Why did God want the tabernacle to be a structure of beauty?

Because the tabernacle housed the presence of God,
and the beauty of His house needed to reflect
the beauty and majesty of its resident.

It was the temple that house God's presence in the world.

But that was the OT, the Old Covenant.

Where does the presence of the Lord reside now...in the New Covenant?

In 1 Cor 6:19, Paul tells us,

"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?"

Paul is saying that previously,

it was the temple that housed God's presence in the world.

Now we are the temple...it is our lives that house God's presence.

So now, it is our lives that

ought to reflect the beauty and majesty of its resident.

Our lives need to be lived in such a way that they

exude the beauty of the one who resides within us.

Lives that are winsome and attractive
...that emanate the light and life of Jesus.

Paul tells us in Titus 2:10 that when we live lives that align with God's ways and nature, we
"make the teaching of God our Savior attractive"!

That's how beauty can save the world.

In this post-Christian culture, the world is not going to be
saved by convincing arguments,
or rigid political ideologies.

People are not going to be attracted to the gospel
through convincing them that we have the truth
...so come over to our side!

It is when people see the beauty of a life brimming over
with the words and love and life of Jesus.

It is when people see communities of beauty
...communities living together in unity,
serving compassionately,
listening to others with humility and love
...this is how people will see the Kingdom of God,
and be drawn to its power and truth.

It is when the individual lives within that community are lived with profound beauty.

And what does that mean?

What does that look like?

It is when our lives become a vessel for the life of the
One who has taken up residency in us.

It is when our lives become channels of the Kingdom of God
...conduits through which the Kingdom of God flows out into the world.

It is when we are able to say, along with the apostle Paul,
"It is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me".

That is how beauty can save the world, and that is how beauty saved me.

You see...the summer after I graduated from High School in (Bryan, Ohio...Miami University) Chuck and Rich...their lives were winsome and attractive...and it was the beauty that I saw in those two lives that drew me to God.