

Beauty for Ashes

(No. 3336)

A SERMON PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 9, 1913.

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"To give unto them [who mourn in Zion] beauty for ashes." [Isaiah 61:3](#).

I WOULD remind you that the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ related to mourners in Zion. He did not come into the world to exalt those who are high, to give greater power to the strong, or to clothe those who are already clad in their own righteousness. No! The Spirit of God was upon Him that He might preach good tidings to the meek, that broken hearts should be bound up, captives redeemed and prisoners released. He came with blessings for the poor, not with luxuries for the rich. This ought to be a very great subject of thanksgiving to those who are heavy of heart. Is it not sweet to think that the Anointed of the Lord came for your sakes, that you of the rueful countenance whose eyelids are fringed with beaded tears, you whose songs are dirges, you who dwell at death's door may be brought forth into the sunlight? Most men choose cheerful company whereby they may be entertained, but the Lord Jesus evidently selects mourners and delights in those whom He may encourage and cheer. Blessed be His name! How meek and lowly is He in all His ways! How forgetful of Self and how thoughtful towards His poor servants. He looks upon them with pitying eyes and makes untold blessings their portion!

Notice with pleasure that in dealing with mourners, according to the text before us, the Lord acts upon terms of exchange or barter. He gives them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. It is a gracious exchange, but it is tantamount to everything being a free gift. "To give unto them beauty for ashes" is a free gift because what He takes away is of no value and they are glad to be rid of it. In condescending compassion He took our ashes upon Himself. Ah, how they once covered His sacred head and marred His beauty! He took our mourning. Alas, how it made Him the Man of Sorrows in the day of His humiliation! He took our spirit of heaviness and as He lay prostrate in the Garden beneath the load, He was exceedingly heavy and sorrowful even unto death! He took a loss to give us a gain and so it is a barter in which there is a double profit upon our side—we lose a loss and the gain is pure gain! From our Lord the blessings of love are all of Free Grace and, therefore, let Him have all the praise! I am sure that no mourner would hesitate to deal with Jesus on these special terms, of which only Divine Love could have thought. If you have ashes, will you not be glad to exchange them for beauty? If you are mourning, will you not willingly cease from weeping to be anointed with the oil of joy? And if the spirit of heaviness presses upon you like a nightmare, will you not be glad to be set free and to be arrayed in the glittering garments of praise? Yes, there

could not be better terms than those which Grace has invented—we accept them with delight! Poor Mourner, they are especially ordained for you, that by a twofold Grace in removing evil and bestowing good, you might be doubly enriched and comforted!

In our present meditation I shall call attention, first, to the lamentable condition in which many of the Lord's mourners are found—they sit in ashes, expressive of deep sorrow. Secondly, we shall observe the Divine interposition on their behalf, for the ashes are removed and, thirdly, we shall notice the sacred gift—"Beauty for ashes." Let us begin with—

I. THE MOURNER'S CONDITION—He is covered with ashes as the emblem of his sad estate. Let us now, like Cinderella, sit down among the cinders for awhile in order that we may come forth from the ashes with something better than glass slippers, adorned with a beauty which shall befit the king's courts! The fairy fable which has often made our childhood smile shall now be actually realized in our own souls—yes, we shall see how far the Truth of God outshines romance! How much grander are the facts of God than the fictions of men!

It seems, from the text, that the righteous are sometimes covered with grief. Orientals were always excessive in the use of symbols and, therefore, if they were in sorrow, they endeavored to make their outward appearance describe their inward misery. They took off all their soft garments and put on sackcloth—and this they rent and tore into rags! And then

upon their heads, instead of perfumed oil which they were so fond of using, they threw ashes—and so disfigured themselves and made themselves objects of pity. Ashes were of old, signs of mourning, and they continued to be so down to Popish times of which we have a trace in the day called, Ash Wednesday, which was the commencement of the time of fasting known as Lent. It was supposed that those who commenced to fast sat in ashes to begin with. Such symbols we leave to those who believe in the bodily exercises and outward rites of will-worship. However, God's servants have their spiritual fasts and their heads are metaphorically covered with ashes. I will not stop to read you the list of the occasions in which the princes of the royal blood of Heaven are found sitting in the place of humiliation and distress.

Suffice it to say that they began their new life among the ashes. Like Jabez who was more honorable than his brethren, they were born in sorrow. Some of us will never forget our grief for sin—it was a bitterness with which no stranger could intermeddle. We shall never forget the anguish of our soul and our deep humiliation which no ashes could sufficiently symbolize. Like the Patriarch of old, we cried, "I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Repentance since then has always had a large degree of mourning connected with it. Sorrow has salted all our penitential tears. It is right it should be so and it is equally right that we should never leave off repenting. Repentance and faith are two inseparable companions—they flourish or decay together like the two arms of the human body. If faith could enter Heaven, repentance would certainly pass the gate at the same time. That they will not

both enter there, or something near akin to them, I will not venture to assert quite so confidently as some have done. Whether in eternity I shall regret that I have sinned and shall still believe in Jesus and find my everlasting safety in so doing, I will not positively say—but if I so asserted, who could refute the statement? Assuredly we shall mourn for sin as long as we are upon the earth and we do not desire to do otherwise. Grief for sin and love to Jesus will endure through life—there will never come a time when we shall refuse to bathe with tears the pierced feet and kiss them with warmest love—

"Sorrow and love go side by side,
Nor height nor depth can ever divide
Their Heaven-appointed bands.
Those dear associates still are one,
Nor till the race of life is run
Disjoin their wedded hands."

We have to mourn bitterly when we have fallen upon times of strong temptation and, alas, of surprising sin. We grieve to confess the fact, but it is sadly true that faults have overtaken us. Who among God's chosen sheep has not gone astray? In consequence of such sin we have had to return to the sackcloth and the ashes—and our heart has sunk within us. By reason of our old nature we have transgressed like David and then, by reason of our new nature, we have wept like David and mourned our broken bones. If a foul spot has defiled our garments, we have been led by the Holy Spirit to go at once to Jesus and, while He has washed it out with His blood, we have lamented our offense. Whenever Believers permit the fires of sin to burn, they are made, before long, to cast the ashes of repentance upon their heads and shrink into the dust.

Beloved Friends, we have also covered our heads with ashes on account of the sins of others. Parents have been compelled to sorrow very grievously for their sons and daughters. The wail of David is no unusual sound. "O Absalom, my son, my son! Would God I had died for you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Many a woman sits in ashes half her life because of her ungodly husband who makes her life bitter to her. Many a loving sister pines inwardly because of a profligate brother who persists in ruining himself. The crimes of the world are the burdens of the saints. We cannot make the ungodly mourn for their guilt, but we can and do deeply mourn over their insensibility. How can we bear to see our fellow men choosing everlasting destruction, rejecting their own mercies and plunging themselves into eternal misery? If Hagar said, "Let me not see the death of the child," and if the Prophet's eyes ran with ceaseless tears over the slain of his people, shall not we mourn in dust and ashes the willful soul-suicide of our neighbors who perish before our very eyes with mercy at their doors?

Moreover, we pity the Christian who does not frequently mourn over the depravity of the times in which he lives. Infidelity has in these last days stolen the garb of religion so that

now we frequently meet with volumes in which the fundamentals of the faith are denied, written by ministers of churches whose professed creed is orthodox. Our grandfathers would have shuddered at reading from a disciple of Tom Paine sentiments which pretended ministers of the Gospel have given forth to the world! Things have reached a painful pass when those who are called to office on purpose to proclaim the Gospel are allowed to use their position to sow doubts about it and sap and undermine all belief in it. Such conduct is meanness, itself, and it is amazing that the churches tolerate it! Only Satan, himself, could have put it into a man's heart

to become a salaried preacher of the Gospel in order to deny its fundamental truths! He who does this is Judas Redivivus, Iscariot the second! God save us from all complicity with such practical falsehood and fraud! But when the child of God sees this and sees besides this, ritualism and latitudinarianism spreading on all sides, he feels a sympathy with Mordecai of whom we read that "when he perceived all that was done, he rent his clothes and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and cried with a loud and bitter cry." It were a happy omen if there were more of this—and especially if many could be found to imitate Daniel, who said, "I set my face unto the Lord God to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes." We should soon behold the dawn of better days if such ashes were commonly found upon saintly heads!

Yes, the best of God's people must sometimes sit down among the ashes and cry, "Woe is me!" When the saints mourn, it will sometimes happen that they cannot help showing their sorrow—it is too great to be controlled or concealed. Usually a spiritual man tries to conceal his soul's distress and he has his Master's command for so doing, for Jesus said, "You, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that you appear not unto men to fast." In personal trouble we would rather bear our burden alone than load others with it and, therefore, we endeavor to maintain a cheerful manner even when our heart is sinking like a millstone in the flood. As to spiritual depressions, we cannot show these to men who know nothing about them—and in the presence of the ungodly we are dumb upon such topics. But there are sorrows which will have a tongue, concerning which we may even be bidden to speak, as says the Prophet, "O daughter of my people, gird you with sackcloth, and wallow yourself in ashes." At such times we must express our inward grief and then the men of the world begin to ask, "What ails him?" and jeeringly cry, "He is crazy! Religion has turned his brain." Note that mourning young woman—her mother said only the other night, "What makes Jane so sorrowful?" She did not know that her girl was under a sense of sin. Your workmates asked you, my good Friend, the other morning, "What makes you so dull?" They did not comprehend that their vile language had helped to vex your heart, and had wounded you so that your heart was bleeding inwardly. As we have joys that worldlings cannot share, so have we sorrows which they cannot comprehend—and yet we are obliged, now and then, to let them see that we are cast down—even though this brings us new re-

proach! The ashes must sometimes be upon our head and we must cry, "They have heard that I sigh. All my enemies have heard of my trouble." Do not, therefore, beloved Friends, when you see a mournful Believer, condemn him, nor even depreciate him, for his sorrow may be a necessity of nature. Yes it may even be a direct result of his eminence in Divine Grace. He may, perhaps, love the souls of men more than you think. He may have a more tender sense of the sinfulness of sin than you have. And, perhaps, if you knew his family trials and if you knew the jealousy of his walk with God, or if you knew how the Lord has hidden His face from him, you would not wonder at his rueful countenance. You might even marvel that he was not more cast down and you might be ready to give him your pity and even your admiration, instead of your cold censure. Be sure of this, that some of the holiest of men have mourned as David did—"I have eaten ashes like bread and mingled my drink with weeping."

Next let us note that such grief disfigures them. I gather that from the contrast intended by the words of our text—"Beauty for ashes." Ashes are not beautifiers and mournful faces are seldom attractive. A Believer, when he is in a mourning frame of mind wears a marred countenance. He is disfigured before his friends—he makes bad company for them and they are apt to see his weak points. He is disfigured before his fellow Christians—they delight to see a Brother rejoicing in the Lord, for this is a manifest token of favor—but sorrow of heart is often contagious and, therefore, it is not admired. The mourning Christian is especially disfigured in his own esteem. When he looks in the mirror and sees his rueful visage, he cries to himself, "Why are you cast down, O my Soul? Can all be right within? If it is so, why am I thus?" He questions, upbraids and condemns himself. If his eyes were not so weakened by tears, he might see a beauty in his sorrow, yet just now he cannot, but views himself as a mass of uncomeliness! Nor is he altogether in error, for generally with spiritual mourning there is a measure of real disfigurement. Unbelief, for instance, is a terrible blot upon any man's beauty. Distrust of God is a horrible blotch. Discontent exceedingly injures mental and spiritual loveliness. We are not lovely when we are unbelieving, petulant, envious, or discontented. We are not beautiful when we are distrustful and suspicious, self-willed and rebellious! Yet these evils often go with soul-sorrow and we may truthfully say that some Christians are not only at times very sorrowful, but their beauty is marred by their misery.

The grief of good men's hearts is often a very expressive one, as the language before us suggests. When sorrow puts ashes on its head, what does it say? It makes the man eloquently declare that he feels himself to be as worthless as the dust and ashes of his house. "I cover my head," he says, "with ashes to show that the very noblest part of me, my head, my intellect, is a poor fallen earthly thing of which I dare not boast. I count the best thing there is in me to be but dust and ashes fit only to be cast away." You mourners often thus despise yourselves. Well, if it is any consolation to you to know it, I know a minister of Christ who the longer he lives, thinks less and less of himself, and utterly abhors himself before God. It is a wonder

of Divine Grace that the Lord should ever have loved us at all, for there is nothing in our nature that is lovely. Through our fall there is everything in us to be hated by His pure and holy mind, but nothing to esteem—and the best of the best, when they are at their best, are poor creatures. "Lord, what is man that You are mindful of him?" If the Righteous Judge had swept the whole race away at the first with the besom of destruction, He would still have been as great, glorious and blessed as He is—He only spares us because He is Infinite in mercy! When Abraham said, "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, I that am but dust and ashes," he had not too lowly an opinion of himself, for even the Father of the Faithful, though a prince among men, was nothing in himself but a son of fallen Adam! And nothing but undeserved mercy made him to differ from the idolatrous race out of which he was chosen and called. "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes," is our last memorial—and all along we are tending that way by nature, for we are of the earth, earthy. When we put ashes on our head, we do but confess ourselves to be what we really are!

The use of ashes would seem to indicate that the fire is out. Men would not place burning coals upon their heads, but when they cast ashes there, they mean to say, "These ashes from which all fire is gone are like ourselves—we, too, are spent, our fire of hope has burned out, our joy, our confidence, our strength have all departed from us and left us only the black ashes of despair." Is not this suggestive of a state of feeling common enough to truly humbled men? Let me ask my Brothers and Sisters—Have you never felt as if your coal were quenched in Israel? Have you not admitted that, apart from any salvation which might come to you from your dear Lord and Savior, you had no hope whatever? Have you not felt as if every spark of faith, love, gratitude and all that was good, was gone out in darkness? Some of you young Christians have never yet stumbled into that slough, and I hope you never will, but if you ever do, it may console you if I let you know that older saints have been there before you—and have had to cry to the Strong for strength or they would have perished! Some of us know what it is to feel as if we had not even a spark of Grace left. We cry—

"If anything is felt

"Tis only pain to find we cannot feel."

At such times we have felt that if there was any prayer in us it was only a prayer to be helped to pray, or to be helped to mourn that we could not pray, for our stock was lying dead and our poor husbandry yielded us no increase for lack of dew from above. Our soul has been in a state of drought! The rain from Heaven has been withheld and the earth has broken and chapped beneath our feet, devouring rather than nourishing the seed. God's children have their droughts and famines—and then dust and ashes are fit emblems of their dry and dead condition.

Ashes, too, as the symbol of sorrow, might also indicate having passed through the fire of trial, even as these ashes have been burned. Truly, some of God's best servants have been

most often through the furnace and have been so long in the heat that strength fails them and hope well-near expires. They cry to God for patience to endure all His holy will, but they feel that their own power is as much spent as if they were burnt to nothing but ash and there was nothing more left of them upon which the fire could kindle. Is it not a mercy that the Lord looks upon such as these—the utterly spent ones who are ready to be blown away and to perish, even as smoke and dry ashes are borne away by the wind and lost? You who are at ease in Zion know little about these terrible feelings, but you should be grateful to God and sympathize with those who are more exposed to tribulation. Join with them in magnifying the Lord because He promises beauty instead of these ashes of the furnace!

Ashes, also, as you know, are the emblem of death. The Romans placed in sepulchral urns the ashes of the dead. We say, "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes," when we bury the departed. It is not an uncommon thing for tried saints to complain that they are brought into the dust of death by a faintness of mind which renders life a difficulty. We come to look upon the grave as a refuge and a relief. "Ah," cries one, "they may as well bury me, for I am more dead than alive. Well may I heap ashes on my head." Like Elijah, they say, "Let me die, for I am no better than my fathers." To such depths of grief the best of men have sometimes descended. Many of the most peaceful and joyous spirits have joined in David's description of himself—"I am as a man that has no strength: free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom You remember no more: and they are cut off from Your hand."

But enough of this dolorous ditty, let us now change the subject. We have shown you the Believer in the ashes, let us now rejoice that some better thing is in store for him! Secondly, there is—

II. A DIVINE INTERPOSITION. The Lord Himself breaks in upon the mourner's misery and makes the most gracious arrangements for his consolation. When a man is in sore trouble, he naturally begins to look this way and that way

for deliverance and, thereby, much of the man's mind and heart are made manifest. You may readily judge whether you are a child of God or a hypocrite by seeing in what direction your soul turns in seasons of severe trial. The hypocrite flies to the world and finds a sort of comfort there, but the child of God runs to his Father and expects consolation only from the Lord's hand! True Grace abides with God and submits itself to His will. This is always good for us. Brothers and Sisters, if the Lord makes you sick, remain sick till the Lord restores you, for it is dangerous to call in any other physician to your soul but your Lord. If the Lord frowns, do not ask others to smile, for you can derive no joy from that source. If it is God's wrath that breaks you, let God's love mend you, or else remain broken—

"I will not be comforted

Till Jesus comforts me,"

is a sweet resolve of a truly penitent soul, for has not the Lord said, "I kill and I make alive; I wound, and I heal. I the Lord do all these things"? Will you take the healing and the

making alive out of Jehovah's hand? God forbid! Where you have received your smart, there get your sweet. Where you do drink the gall of sorrow, there drink the wine of joy, for in the Lord's hand there is abundant mercy to be found—and He will end your misery!

According to the text, the way in which Believers rise out of their mourning is through the coming of Jesus. Read the Chapter again. What does the Lord say? "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me." Yes, Beloved, our hope lies in the mission of Christ, in the Person of Christ, in the work of Christ, in the application of the blood of Christ to our hearts! We turn our eyes evermore towards the hills from where comes our help! Look, O Sinner, always to the brazen serpent whatever serpent bites you! Whether it is the old serpent, himself, or some smaller serpent of the same brood which lurks in the way and bites at the horse's heels, still look to the one appointed Cure. Never speculate in healing drugs, but keep to the one antidote which never fails! Jesus is the consolation of Israel and let not Israel place her hope elsewhere!

And, mark you, it is Jesus coming in the Gospel which is the mourner's hope—for this coming of the Lord is to preach good tidings to the meek and so to bind up the broken-hearted. I have little confidence in those persons who speak of having received direct Revelations from the Lord, as though He appeared otherwise than by and through the Gospel. His Word is so full, so perfect, that for God to make any fresh Revelation to you or me is quite needless. To do so would be to put a dishonor upon the perfection of that Word! In the "most sure Word of testimony" there is a release from every difficulty, a plaster for every sore, a medicine for every disease! My dear sorrowing Friend, it is very dangerous to look for consolation from dreams, or from the opening of the Bible upon certain texts, or from fancied voices, or from any other of those foolish superstitions in which weak-minded persons seek for comfort! Go you to what God has said in the Scriptures—and when you find your character described and promises made to such a character as your own, then take them home, for they are plainly spoken to you! Go not about to look for comfort in the cloud-land of fancy or the moonshine of superstition, but believe in the Lord Jesus who comes to bless broken hearts in no other way than by preaching to them the glad tidings of His Grace!

You are not to expect the Lord Jesus to speak with you in any other way than by the written Word applied to the soul by the Holy Spirit. Look for no new Revelation! Drive out the very idea as deceptive! If an angel were to come to my chamber and inform me that he brought a message from God which would tell me more than is written in the Scriptures of Truth, I would not listen to him for a moment, but say, "Get you behind me, Satan. The end of these manifestations has come! The stars no more appear, for the sun has risen." Our heavenly Father has already sent the Lord Jesus and it is written, "Last of all He sent His Son." In Christ Jesus there is such a fullness of Truth and Grace that all the angels combined could not increase it. He who looks for more revelation should beware lest he receive the curse with which the Bible concludes—which will certainly come upon any who either add

to, or take from, the Inspired Words of God! The sum of the matter is this—if there is any comfort to be received, it is in Christ. And if there are any ashes to be taken away and any beauty to be given, it will be through the Lord Jesus in the preaching and reading of the Word! This much by way of protest against the superstitions of weak minds.

But now I want you to notice a something which does not appear in our English version, but is clear in the Hebrew. It is that the Lord very easily makes a change in His people's condition, for the word in the Hebrew for ashes is *epheer*, and the word for beauty is *peer*. The change is very slight in the original. Some idea of the similarity of the words may be given you in English if I quote from Master Trapp. "The Lord promises to turn all their sighing into singing, all their musing into music, all their sadness into gladness and all their tears into triumph." Perhaps I may myself give you a closer imitation, still, and more after the Hebrew model, by saying He turns our mourning into morning. In the case before us we might say, "He gives us splendors for cinders," beauty for ashes. Now, as readily as we change a word by a single letter, so easily does the God of All Comfort alter the state of His own people! With Him nothing is hard, much less impossible. From the Cross to the crown, from the thorn to the throne, from misery to majesty, is but a hand's turn with the Lord! Often does He call His people like Mordecai from sitting at the gate to riding upon the king's horse, like Joseph from lying in the dungeon to ruling in the land, like Job from the dunghill to double wealth, like David from the caves of Engedi to the palace in Jerusalem. This He does both suddenly and easily, as when a man lights a candle and the darkness departs at once! How charming and astonishing the change to pass in a moment from winter into summer, from midnight into noon, from storm into profound calm! This is the finger of God and it is often seen.

When you are at your lowest do not conclude that it will be months before you can rise. Not so. From the lowest point to the highest you will spring at a single leap when the Almighty Helper girds you with power! David in the Psalms describes the Lord coming to his rescue in haste most marvelous. Out of the depths was he snatched by the flash of Jehovah's power!—

"On cherub and on cherubim
Right royally He rode,
And on the wings of mighty winds
Came flying all abroad!
And so delivered He my soul—
Who is a Rock but He?
He lives—Blessed be my Rock!
My God exalted be."

How joyously he sings! And well he may after so special a rescue. There is no slow travelling with God when His people are in sorrow. Before they have time to call, He answers

them! While they are yet speaking, He hears their requests! He hears them chanting "De Profundis," and He lifts them to sing aloud, "Gloria in Excelsis." From "Out of the depths" their tune changes to, "Glory in the highest." Nor are there slow pauses of weary hope, but the Lord works a world of wonders in the twinkling of an eye!

Thus we see how our Lord gives beauty for ashes. We now turn to the last point, which is—

III. WHAT HE BESTOWS INSTEAD OF THE ASHES—beauty. All disfigurement is removed. The ashes had

made the person to be defiled, uncomely to others and unpleasant to himself, but all this is removed. Beauty is given and his countenance is not marred with dust and grime. His face is bright with joy and beaming with hope. No more unpleasant to the eyes, the person has even become attractive and delightful! The original Hebrew implies that occasions for joy and emblems of joy are also given, for it might be read, "A chaplet for ashes." The ashes were on the head and now a crown is placed there. The allusion is to the nuptial tiara which men wore on their marriage day. The Lord's mourners are to be decked with crowns of delight instead of being disfigured with ashes of grief. When does that happen to us? Do you recollect when you first obtained a sense of forgiveness? How gloriously were you then arrayed! When the father said of His prodigal son, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet," that was a high day! And so was it with us when we were delivered from our filthy rags and clothed in Divine Righteousness! Our ashes were gone, then, and a crown adorned our heads. Forgiven! It was a joy of joys! Even now as we look back upon it we begin to sing again—

"Happy day! Happy day!

When Jesus washed my sins away"

We went a little farther on in spiritual life and then we discovered that we were the children of God! We did not at first know our Adoption, but it burst gloriously upon us like a newly kindled sun! Do you recollect when you first learned the meaning of the word and perceived that Adoption secured eternal salvation? For the heavenly Father does not cast His children away, nor can they cease to be the objects of His love! How can any child be unchilded? And if still a child, he must still be beloved and still an heir! When you once drank consolation from that Doctrine, did you not receive a tiara for ashes? How lovely a thing it is to be a child of God! "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!"

We lived a little longer, and we began to understand the Doctrine of Vital Union with Christ. We had not dreamed of it at first. We then discovered that there is a vital, actual union between us and Christ—that we are married to Him! It is a great mystery, but yet it is a great Truth of God. It is all but inconceivable that we should be members of His body, of

His flesh and of His bones—and yet it is even so. That was a heavenly day wherein we perceived that we were one with Jesus—"by eternal union, one." Then we rejoiced as wearers of a marriage crown and we sang

"My Beloved is mine and I am His." Since then we have learned other Truths and on each occasion of being thus taught of the Lord we have again obtained a crown for ashes! Another and yet another chaplet has adorned our brow. We have felt ourselves to be made priests and kings unto God and the beauty of the Lord our God has rested upon us! All glory be to His name!

Let us remark that the contrast of our text is peculiarly suggestive because it is not quite what we might expect. The Lord takes away our ashes, but what does He give in exchange? The natural contrast would be joy, but the Lord bestows that which is better, namely, beauty, because that is not only joy to ourselves but to others. "A thing of beauty," as we say, "is a joy forever." A beautiful person gives pleasure to all around. Now, child of God, you are not only to have those ashes taken away which have disfigured you, but you are actually to become the source of joy to others! How pleasant that will be for you who have so long touched the mournful string that you have distressed your family.

Yes, young Friend, you are to make your mother rejoice by telling her that you have found peace with God! You are yet to cheer your father's heart, young woman, when you shall say to him, "Father, I have found Him in whom you trust and I am trusting in Him, too." Yes, poor Mourner, you will yourself be comforting other mourners one of these days! You who have been in Giant Despair's castle shall help in pulling down the monster's den! You can hardly believe it, but so it shall be!

In the sense of being a joy to others, many of the Lord's people are very beautiful, indeed. You cannot help being charmed with them, especially with those of deep experience. Good men are glad of the company of those to whom the Lord has given the beauty of Divine Grace. Even the ungodly, though they do not confess it, have a respect for the majesty of holy characters. There is a charm about Beauty which makes her ride as on a lion through the midst of her foes—every man's hand is bound to defend her—and none dare to injure her! The beauty which the Lord gives to His people is as a queen among all beauties and sways a potent scepter!

Yes, and when the Lord makes His people beautiful they are a delight even to God, Himself, for the Lord rejoices in His works and His works of Grace are the noblest labor of His hands and, as being fullest of Divine Grace, are most graceful! The Lord delights in His people! We read of the Lord Jesus that His delights were with the sons of men, and even now, though angelic harps ring out His praises, He loves to be here in our Churches and to commune with us as a man speaks with his friend. Beloved, cultivate His society! Abide with Him and if He can find any cause of delight in you, which is a wonder of wonders, put all your delight in Him!

Let us have this gracious beauty about us and even our heavenly Bridegroom will have to say, "Turn away your eyes from Me, for they have overcome Me. You have ravished My heart with one of your eyes." May we be kept from marring this beauty and be forever so fair that even our Lord, Himself, may look and love! Amen.