

Theological Equipping Class
March 5, 2023
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Biblical Themes - Beauty

Beauty: *God's conspicuous glory*

Class Outline:

1. All beauty is a gift from God
2. We are called to cultivate beauty, to the glory of God
3. We exploit beauty for our own glory
4. Jesus redeems the beauty we destroy
5. We are (still) called to cultivate beauty, to the glory of God
6. God gives eternal beauty

1. All beauty is a gift from God

*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
(Psalm 19:1)*

Created beauty is an unnecessary gift.

God graciously gives the gift of beauty from Himself.

*And God saw that the light was good. (Genesis 1:4a)
And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:10b)
And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:12b)
And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:18b)
And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:21b)
And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:25b)
And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)*

And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the

garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good... (Genesis 2:8–12a)

God is a God of beauty...not a God of utility.

God's creation is a beauty that he shares—specifically with mankind.

2. We are called to cultivate beauty, to the glory of God

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:28)

To be human and to exist as God designed us to exist, is to be concerned with the spread of beauty.

3. We exploit beauty for our own glory

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. (Genesis 3:6–7)

The story of mankind's sin can be summed up in this way: Taking the beauty God has given and exploiting it for our own glory—covering over God's beauty and destroying God's beauty in the process.

The Tower of Babel

And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. 4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." (Genesis 11:3–4)

Beauty, to sinful humanity, is only as valuable as it is useful.

David and Bathsheba

It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant." (2 Samuel 11:2–5)

You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanness. And you shall not lie sexually with your neighbor's wife and so make yourself unclean with her. (Leviticus 18:19–20)

Our habit is to exploit beauty and to even destroy beauty, for the sake of building up our own glory.

As you read through the Old Testament, it becomes clear that mankind cannot restore our former beauty. We need the giver of beauty to once again redeem the beauty we've destroyed.

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified. They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. (Isaiah 61:1–4)

4. Jesus redeems the beauty we destroy

He redefines our fallen understanding of beauty

For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isaiah 53:2–3)

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." (Matthew 17:1–5)

Jesus, in his living, sets the definition and our standard for beauty which includes good works that display the conspicuous glory of God.

He cultivates and restores what has been destroyed

Jesus lifts up God's image bearers

The cross is a creative work

Jesus graciously gives the gift of beauty from Himself.

5. We are (still) called to cultivate beauty, to the glory of God

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18–20)

The great commission is Jesus's creation mandate

How should we go about cultivating beauty, to the glory of God?

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. (1 Timothy 2:8–10)

Good works are the beauty we're called to cultivate

Good works include creative works

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. (John 2:1–11)

When Jesus creates, it's beautiful. Jesus can't help but create beautiful wine, because he's the God of beauty.

When the people of God create, it ought to be beautiful.

Go, therefore, and cultivate beautiful things.

6. God gives eternal beauty

Jesus promises to establish an eternal kingdom of beauty

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal...The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. (Revelation 21:10-11, 18-21)

Q&A Notes:

Further Reading:

Art + Faith: A Theology of Making, by Makoto Fujimura

For The Beauty of The Church: Casting a Vision for the Arts, edited by David O. Taylor

Rembrandt Is In The Wind: Learning to Love Art through the Eyes of Faith, by Russ Ramsey