

## THE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on August 16, 1970 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

Over the past few years there has been considerable comment regarding “the beautiful people.” The designation has to do with certain affluent, knowledgeable, often highly placed, successful, attractive and intelligent men and women. But what is true beauty, and who are the beautiful people in the sight of God? In this connection we remember a statement from Solomon, who wrote of God who “has made everything beautiful in its time” and who “hath set eternity in their heart.” (Eccl. 3:11). At least in its origin and design God has made everything beautiful.

The Bible often mentions beautiful people. Sarah, for example, heard her husband Abraham’s appraisal, “Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon.” (Gen. 12:11). “... Rachel was beautiful and well-favored.” (Gen. 29:17). “... Joseph was comely and well-favored.” (Gen. 39:6). Of Moses it was said at the time of his birth, “And the woman conceived, and bear a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months.” (Ex. 2:2). Of David it was said, “... Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look upon.” (I Sam. 16:12). Bathsheba was described, “... the woman was very beautiful to look upon.” (II Sam. 11:2). Concerning Esther we read, “And he brought up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle’s daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maiden was fair and beautiful; and when her father and mother were dead, Mordecai took her for his own daughter.” (Esther 2:7).

However, the scriptures are far more concerned with spiritual beauty than with mere physical attractiveness. We feel this in passage after passage of the scriptures. As an example, we might read David’s statement, “Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.” (I Chron. 16:29). The expression “beauty of holiness” is especially appealing. We would do well to give this expression time and thought.

In the 27th Psalm, David added, “One thing have I asked of Jehovah, that will I seek after: That I may dwell in the house of Jehovah all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of Jehovah, and to inquire in his temple.” (Ps. 27:4). In the 90th Psalm, generally attributed to Moses, there are the words, “And let the beauty of the Lord thy God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.” (Ps. 90:17). The inner-spiritual beauty which God appreciates is referred to in Paul’s statement, “... though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day.” (II Cor. 4:16).

### Examples of Beautiful People

Not only are there many passages in the scriptures which refer to the inner spiritual beauty which God appreciates, but there are numbers of people whose lives possess this inner, spiritual beauty which God desires for all men. Among them was Enoch who lived almost at the dawn of history. After telling his age, after recording the fact that he had many sons and daughters, the record tells us “... and Enoch walked with God; and he was not: for God took him.” (Gen. 5:24). What a beautiful, intimate relationship this suggests. Enoch was a man who lived so close to God that he can be described as one who walked with God and one who was miraculously taken by the Lord.

Joseph, whom we mentioned a moment ago as “comely and well-favored,” must have been outstanding in his beauty. The noted Biblical commentator, Adam Clarke, in his discussion of Gen. 39:6, said of Joseph, “He was beautiful in his person, and beautiful in his countenance ... The beauty of Joseph is celebrated over all the East, and the Persian poets vie with each other in descriptions of his comeliness. Mohammed spends the twelfth chapter of the Koran entirely on Joseph, and represents him as a perfect beauty, and the most accomplished of mortals. From his account the Passion of Zuleekha (traditionally the name for Potiphar’s wife) being known to the ladies of the court, they cast the severest reflections upon her ... When she invited forty of these ladies to dine in her house and suddenly brought Joseph in, they are supposed to have cried out, “This is not a human being, this is none other than a glorious angel.” Whether this traditional story is true or not, as recorded by Adam Clarke, it does indicate the long, solid tradition which adds some meaning to the brief statement in the scriptures about Joseph’s beauty.

Leslie G. Thomas, an outstanding writer and preacher, has a book about Ruth, which he titled *The Beautiful Gleaner*. In this book he says, “Ruth is the kind of woman that draws the world after her ... by the lasting qualities of her unselfish devotion, of lowly serviceableness, of ... modesty. She is one of the characters that humanity takes delight in remembering. Men enjoy studying this story because it touches them with the mystery and charm of early love. Women delight in reading because in it they recognize the best and loveliest type of womanhood.

### Outside the Scriptures

Turning from examples of beauty which one finds in the scriptures, we mention several outside the scriptures which have a quality that can only be described as beautiful. Martin Luther, when called upon to renounce his convictions before the Diet of Worms, had

the courage to say, even though his life seemed to depend upon his renunciation of his own writings, "It is neither safe nor wise to do anything against conscience ... here I stand; I cannot do otherwise; God help me--Amen." Many a lesser man would have bowed down to the pressures about him. There is a rugged beauty in one who stands for his convictions at whatever cost.

Another example of this same kind of deep conviction is found in the life of Hugh Latimer, the great reformer of 16th century England. On one occasion when he had been called by Henry VIII to deliver a sermon, he offended the King by some plain speaking. The king ordered him to preach again the following Sunday and to make apology for the offense he had given. On the next Sunday, after he had given out his text, Latimer began by addressing his own soul: "Hugh Latimer, dost thou know before whom thou art this day to speak. To the high and mighty monarch, the King's most excellent majesty, who can take away thy life if thou offendest. Therefore, take heed that thou speakest not a word that may displease. But then, consider well, Hugh. Dost thou not know from whence thou comest, upon whose message thou art sent? Even by the great and mighty God, who is present, and who beholdest all thy ways, and who is able to cast thy soul into hell? Therefore take care that thou deliverest thy message faithfully." He then repeated the sermon which he had preached the previous Sunday without alteration, even though he knew that it had already been offensive to the king. Amazingly, at the conclusion of this second preaching of the sermon, the king arose, embraced Latimer, and said, "Blessed be God I have so honest a servant." Surely this was a courageous act on the part of Latimer. Surely it indicates a kind of inner strength that is indeed beautiful.

One of our friends, Wendell Winkler, a fellow-preacher, some months ago asked his teen-age class, "What would you like to be doing if Jesus came today? The answers are quite interesting. One young person wrote, "If Christ came today I would like to be in a worship service praising God, or teaching someone about him." Another said, "If Christ came today I would like to be praying for the souls that rejected Christ, and for those who have never heard his word." Still another wrote, "If Christ came today I'd like to be in church praising God, or by my grandmother's grave so I could see her as quickly as possible." Still another young person wrote, "If Christ came today I would like for him to find me doing something nice for someone else." Yet another said "If Christ came today I would like to be in prayer, and know that my last moments were spent in contact with God." Still another wrote, "If Christ came today I would like to be sacrificially serving Christ as a teacher, or leading someone to Christ." Finally, I will quote one other who said, "If Christ came today I would love to be at Brookhaven Rest Home, sitting next to Helen Ford. All her suffering would end then."

To me, there is something beautiful about these genuine, intimate glimpses into the feelings of these teen-age young people. Their thoughts are so unselfishly centered upon others. I think that we can certainly see that there are yet many fine Christian young people in the world. We can also see that they have received some very fine instruction which has developed into meaningful faith. We believe that young people like these give promise for the future of the church and of Christ's way.

### Transformation

Our deepest concern is for the transformation of sinful men and women, such as all of us, into spiritually beautiful people. The great tragedy of our world is that after a perfect creation with beauty on every hand, sin and degradation came into this idyllic scene and brought ugliness and tragedy. Our greatest concern is that we might be transformed again into the purity and the beauty of God's original creation. All of us have read perhaps of the alchemists of the Dark Ages who tried to transform the baser metals into gold. They performed countless experiments, many of which are now ludicrous to contemplate, in the hope that they might change some relatively common and inexpensive metal into gold. In every case they failed, for such transformation is simply not possible. It is possible, however, for a far more significant transformation to take place--the transformation of sinful man into the beautiful person that God would have him to become. Of course, this is the essence of why Christ came to earth, why he lived his sinless life as an example, and why he left his teachings for all men of all time to appropriate. The redemption of reforming of man is the heart of the story of the Bible.

The method by which this transformation can take place is also set forth in the scriptures. It was Solomon who wrote, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." (Prov. 23:7). By determining what goes into man's mind, or heart, it can be determined what he will believe and ultimately what he will be. The same emphasis is found in the New Testament book of Philippians, where the apostle Paul said, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. The things which ye both learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things do: and the God of peace shall be with you." (Phil. 4:8-9). If our minds can be centered upon these positive, uplifting themes there will inevitably be a transformation of life.

Yet another passage in which this basic concept is presented is II Cor.3:18, where we read, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord of the Spirit." In his Roman letter Paul further said, "And be not fashioned according to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Rom. 12:2). In the prologue of John's gospel are the words, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." (John 1:12).

### Qualities Which Make For Beauty

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has long had its list of "The Ten Most Wanted Men." These are men who are thought to be guilty of such criminal action that they are actually dangerous to society. Keith Flake of Phoenix, Arizona, has made an entirely different kind of list of the "Ten Most Wanted Men in Industry." Although we can see some special significance of his list for industry or business, it has a much wider application than in this limited field. His list includes, "1. The man who is skilled. 2. The man who can think. 3. The man who can delegate authority. 4. The man who motivates people. 5. The man who inspires confidence. 6. The man who accepts change. 7. The man who can be trusted. 8. The man who is loyal. 9. The man who has drive. 10. The man who is optimistic."

We would also add as indicative of some of the qualities that make for beauty of life the words of Henry Van Dyke, "If a man would make his record true, the following things he must do, think without confusion clearly, love your fellowman sincerely, act from honest motives purely, trust in heaven and God securely." We also remember Abraham Lincoln's statement, "Let it be known by those who know me best, that I plucked a thistle and planted a rose where a rose would grow." These are a few of the qualities that help to make for beauty of life.

### Conclusion

Most of all, however, if we would make our lives beautiful, we must follow Christ. He will lead us to perfection. He will never lead us astray. The beauty of his own life is assurance that if we will follow in his steps to the best of our ability our lives will be beautiful, too.

We constantly are amazed by the universality of Christ's appeal. There are many who do not accept the Biblical claim of his divinity, who admire and appreciate him as a great man. Some years ago when I was visiting in Japan after World War II, friends pointed out that there was a strong movement among the Japanese people in the direction of Christ and his way of living. These were people who had no interest in being part of his or any church, but who had admired Christ and his teaching. They were known as the "No-Church Christians." Throughout the centuries, among most diverse groups of men, Christ has been admired. The young and the old, the rich and the poor, the educated and the ignorant, the powerful and the weak--all admire Christ. His was a life of such beauty that no one could turn away from it in derision or scorn. His moral and ethical teachings are so elevated that they cannot be described except as beautiful goals for which all men should strive. The general admiration of Christ is encouraging, but salvation requires more than long-range appreciation.

The Lord's invitation is for all men of all time. If you would make your life beautiful both within and without, follow Christ and live by his teachings. It all begins when one learns of the Lord and comes to believe that he is the Son of God. When this faith is strong enough, it leads one to obey the Lord's command to repent of all past sin, to confess the Lord before men, and to be buried with him in the beautifully symbolic act of baptism. Then one is raised from the grave of water, to live a new kind of life, wearing the name of Christ, and living by a different standard. Happiness, peace, and beauty, along with faith and hope and love, are the qualities which the new Christian life displays. Surely this is appealing to all men.