

Beautiful People

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. Welcome to Beautiful People, the second class in the series on beauty, art, and the gospel.

So we'll start by just quickly reviewing a takeaway or one of the main concepts from last class. So we brought scripture to bear upon a dictionary definition of beauty, largely inspired by the philosopher Immanuel Kant from the 18th century.

Though there are many definitions of beauty, I focused on the feeling of pleasure that people have through the senses, which is given to us in the Oxford English Dictionary. This theme of what is pleasing to the senses, though not framed as beauty in scripture, is present as a theme in scripture.

And we can relate it first and foremost to God. Scripture thus revises a common conception of beauty. Though scripture does not neglect the sensory phenomenon of pleasure for people, the most important beholder is not the person, but God.

So, in the second class, a single verse from the book of Romans shows us how God beholds us as pleasing or beautiful to him.

[1:37] I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual worship.

So, two of the takeaways are quite simple and come directly from that verse. Beautiful people see the mercy of God in view of God's mercy, which will impact a little bit in the first half of this class.

And their beauty is to God, not primarily to anyone else. So, the first takeaway, beautiful people see the mercy of God.

As it therefore suggests in the Romans verse from Paul's letter to the Romans from around 57 AD, he has for many previous chapters and verses expressed the mercy of God.

In chapter 11, in particular, he writes about the generous mercy of God for both Jews and Gentiles. So, though Paul focuses on the Gentiles in chapter 11, his message is also for Israel.

[2:47] If we look to the Old Testament, the concept of mercy appears in different ways. One such way is tied to the presence of God. The mercy seat is one such example which we see in Exodus, the Psalms, Isaiah, and 1 and 2 Samuel.

Related passages refer to God as King who sits upon the mercy seat. So, we'll take a look at Exodus, where we find first mention of the mercy seat in chapter 25.

The mercy seat is very small compared with the entire complex of the tabernacle. The design of said complex given to Moses by the Lord is pictured on your left.

I've circled the area of the Ark of the Covenant to which the mercy seat is attached. So, it's that tiny red circle. We discover more about the mercy seat in the context of a Jewish annual festival called the Day of Atonement, a major theme in the book of Leviticus.

In this passage, we discover that God appears over the mercy seat. The high priest cannot enter at any time the space of the Holy Holies, where God presents himself over the mercy seat, because the said priest would come undone, namely die in the presence of God.

[4:06] Still, there was one day, the Day of Atonement, on which the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies. On this day, the priest reunited himself and Israel to God through the offering of a ram, bull, and two goats.

On this day, the Lord instructed the high priest to enter the Holy of Holies and go before the mercy seat. He could not go before the mercy seat unequipped.

The priest would take a few handfuls of coals and sweet-smelling incense and burn them in a censer, a vessel for burning incense. He would then bring them inside to the room beyond the curtain with a four-winged cherubim, where the ark was.

As such, the fumes from the censer would cloud his view of the presence of God in the mercy seat and protect him in that way. The very reason for which he entered this special room, which contained the mercy seat, also known as the Holy of Holies, was so that he could sprinkle the blood of an animal on it.

One of the animals taken as a sin offering, which he burned on the altar outside the tabernacle, framed in blue. In sum, the mercy seat was restricted to a high rank of priests and one day a year.

[5:21] Shifting from Leviticus to the New Testament book of Hebrews, set after Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, we learn that the method of entering into the presence of God, like the high priest on the Day of Atonement, is obsolete, or in the terms of Hebrews, a shadow of things to come.

Jesus offers us a model of being a priest that is different from the priest in Leviticus. He is not like the kinds of priests who need incense to protect themselves from God on the Day of Atonement.

This is why the unknown writer of Hebrews connects Jesus not to the Levitical priesthood, but to the order of Melchizedek. Little is written about Melchizedek.

We know from Genesis 14 that he blesses Abraham with a meal in Jerusalem after his military victory. He is a priest of God Most High, and his name Melchizedek translates from Hebrews into King of Righteousness, which points to Christ.

So while Jesus is not connected to the Levitical priesthood, he still in some way acts as a priest. He achieves unity to God, or atonement. Jesus achieves unity to the Father, not by the blood of animals and goats, but by his own blood.

[6:35] But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is, not of the creation, he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

Most importantly, Jesus' priesthood is merciful and allows more people to enter the presence of God. His presence in this tent, in the tent stated in Hebrews, signals throughout Hebrews not an earthly tabernacle, as in the images that I've shown, but a space in heaven marked in some fashion by the reign of God the Father, with Jesus at his right hand.

In drawing near to God through the blood of Christ, we draw near to his mercy. Curtain nor cloud of incenses separates us from his mercy. So beautiful people see God's mercy.

The second point that I'll make is beautiful people are pleasing to God. So we see in the context of sacrifices that the pleasing aroma is to God.

So I'll just briefly go over five of the sacrifices from the Old Testament where we see this theme of a pleasing aroma to God come up. So the system, as I've mentioned, is very complex and my understanding is very limited of it.

[8:12] But I'll mention five main offerings or sacrifices. The latter term sacrifice excludes the grain offering in which nothing actually dies. So we have burnt offerings, which consisted of slaughtered cattle, sheep, goats, birds.

Fat, the most valuable part of the animal, was not consumed. Blood was poured... Sorry, I negate that comment about the fat.

So blood was poured on these sides of the altar and it was entirely burnt on the altar for the burnt offering. And then for grain offering, we have flour, grain, oil, and frankincense, which is the dried sap of trees, which smelled good.

And then peace offering, cattle, sheep, goats. Sin offering, cattle, sheep, goats, and birds. Guilt offering, rams. Each of these five types of offering for the most part include slaughtering an animal in the court of the tabernacle in the altar framed in the blue in the last slide and throwing the blood against the sides of the altar, peeling the skin off the animal, burning on the altar parts of the animal, which created a pleasing aroma to the Lord, sprinkling the blood of an animal inside the temple, and a priestly and lay person consuming certain parts of the animal, but not in the case of a burnt offering, and then handling the rest of the parts of the animal outside the court.

So a few examples of where we see God as an aesthetic being coming up, a pleasing aroma to the Lord, is in this verse from Leviticus, for the burnt offering, and the priest shall burn all of it on the altar as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord, and then another example for the grain offering, and one shall take from it a handful of the fine flour of the grain offering and its oil and all the frankincense that is on the grain offering, and burn this as its memorial portion on the altar, a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

[10:18] So back to our verse from Romans, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual worship.

So, yeah, so the five offerings and sacrifices that I have referred to show that God is pleased with those sacrifices then, and now he is pleased with spiritual worship or the worship of the believer.

And the one who views God's mercy. I'll finish with six instances where God, where his people as living sacrifices bring a pleasing aroma to God.

So, in Luke, now when all the people were baptized and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came from heaven, you are my beloved son, with you I am well pleased.

So at the beginning of his ministry, what pleases God is Jesus in prayer and in baptism. It is difficult to say whether Jesus saw his own mercy here in this intimate exchange with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

[11:44] God, though, is certainly the beholder of Jesus's beauty. You are my beloved son, the Father says, with you I am well pleased. And then in Ephesians, and then in Ephesians, therefore be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians from around 62 AD, we see the author's view of God's mercy in the blood of Christ. Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

We see the same concept of walking in this verse from Colossians, which I'll ask Elise to read. Colossians 1.

Oh, sorry. Yeah, Colossians. Colossians 1. And now you're 10. And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good word and increasing in the knowledge of God.

So to walk is a Jewish metaphor for conducting or behaving oneself. It corresponds to the Hebrew term *halak*. The rabbis had an entire oral tradition called *halak* for behavior, especially in the Mishnah and the Talmuds.

[13:26] And as a former rabbi, Paul calls the readers of his letter to walk in the shape of a cross. He calls them to imitate Jesus in the laying down of his life for the world he loves.

The imitation of believers is here, beautiful to God. And then 2 Corinthians. 2 Corinthians 2.

verses 14 to 17. But things be to God, who, in Christ, always leads us in time of procession, and through us, attracts the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

For we are the aroma of Christ to God, among those who are being saved, and among those who are perishing, to one, a fragrance from death to death, to the other, a fragrance from life to life.

Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, who have words of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God, we speak in Christ.

[14:34] Thank you. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul praises God for leading him in triumphal procession, a metaphor, perhaps with two layers, that reflect the themes of 2 Corinthians, that Paul is like a suffering prisoner in Rome, but Christ, as the victor, is the general, and has captured him.

Given the language of sacrifice, and allusion to suffering, it is possible that, as in Ephesians, Paul refers to the knowledge of Christ's death, as embodied by Paul, in his suffering for Christ, the victor.

Notably, this knowledge is pleasing, to those who are being saved, and are not pleasing to those who are not being saved. Philippians. I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at length, you have revoked your concern for me.

You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am, to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound.

In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing, hunger, abundance, and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.

[15:49] I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours, according to his riches and glory in Christ Jesus.

So the Philippians view God's mercy in their devotion to Paul, whose finances waver. So Paul considers their affectionate sacrifices partnership in this letter, which attests to their view of the mercy of God through Jesus, who laid down his life for them willingly.

Paul here specifies that the gift is beautiful to God. And then Hebrews, through him, Jesus, then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Again, in Hebrews, the generosity of the church is primarily beautiful to God.

Though we know Paul's appreciation of the gift from the Philippians, it is God who finds it beautiful. Now for a few questions. How does beauty relate to our experiences of giving?

[17:12] Do you usually see your acts of giving as beautiful to God or as beautiful to people? And in which ways are we tempted to orient our beauty towards people more broadly, maybe not in the context of generosity or giving?

So I'll ask you to get into small groups and then we can share and pray for each other after. So maybe...

Do you... Do you... Do you... Do you... Do you... Do you... Do you...

Do you... Do you... Have... Do you... Do... Do you... Do you... Do you... Do you...

Do you... Do you... Do you... Do you... Do you... Do you... Do you... Do you... Do you... Do you...