

TEXT: Ecclesiastes 3:11

THEME: BEAUTY: OURS AND GOD'S

**He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. (Ecc 3:11)<sup>NIV</sup>**

Dear Fellow Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb:

Beauty. If we look, we can see beauty all around us. There is the beauty of nature, which we can see so easily in all four seasons here in the beautiful state of Michigan. There is beauty in art and architecture, as people use their God-given gifts to produce lovely things to look at and efficient, functional, and inspiring places in which to live and work. There is beauty in this gathering this morning—not just with nice clothes and fascinators—but most importantly, most truly beautifully in the Christian women and men gathered together around God's Word, singing his praises, and bringing him their thankofferings. This is a beautiful gathering because God is here with us, and has always been for the past 25 years at Today's Christian Women's Retreat. It is a beautiful thing! But perhaps not so much in the way society thinks.

Society looks at beauty much differently. The people of this world think that you can buy beauty. The global beauty or cosmetic industry is valued at over \$532 billion dollars. Here in the USA, we make up 25% of that industry, or \$134 billion dollars. That means each US citizen spends \$411 annually on beauty or cosmetic products. For example, I just spent \$7 on this sample box of men's hair and skin products. If I actually started using these products as the manufacturer suggests, I would quickly start contributing my full \$411 annually to the US beauty and cosmetic economy. I'm not going to do that, but I am confident that someone else will pick up my slacking off in this department. But no matter how much we spend on beauty products and cosmetic procedures, none of it will last, it is only temporary, (dare I say it, it is only cosmetic—an appearance, an illusion, only skin-deep).

Now, don't get me wrong. God loves beauty. He created so much beauty in our world that is truly extravagant and not absolutely necessary. Why did God make flowers and butterflies and birds so colorful and delightful to see? Why did he create the "purple mountain's majesty" and fascinating waterfalls? Why did he create such beautiful women and handsome men? The Psalmist David wrote: **"Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (Ps 29:2<sup>KJV</sup>)**. Our God loves beauty and his holiness is beautiful. He has created beauty in this world—some of it simply for our enjoyment. And it should always lead us to give him glory and praise.

As we heard in our Old Testament lesson, God made Sarai a remarkably beautiful woman. Abram knew she was beautiful—so beautiful that he felt his own life was in danger. As her husband, he might be killed so that Pharaoh could have Sarai for himself. Instead of trusting in God to keep him safe, he told a lie, and Sarai went along with it. What a position Abram put his wife in! And sure enough, Sarai's beauty caught the attention of the Egyptian officials, who praised her beauty to Pharaoh so that Pharaoh brought her into his palace to make her one of his wives. This was an ugly thing that Abram did and that Sarai

went along with. But God was still in control. He protected Sarai by sending a plague on Pharaoh and his household and somehow revealed to Pharaoh that Sarai was really Abram's wife, not his sister. In the meantime, God made sure that Abram acquired camels, cattle, donkeys, sheep, and human servants. In Egypt, God gave Abram the physical means he would need to become a great nation. So, out of the ugliness of sin, God brought about beauty for his chosen people in his time.

We heard of another ugly scene in our Gospel lesson. A woman was rebuked harshly for pouring very expensive perfume on Jesus' head. This was no ordinary perfume, my friends. Mark wrote that it could have been sold for a year's wages. What do you make in a year? Would you ever dream of paying \$30, 50, 70 thousand dollars for a bottle of perfume, and then using it all up at one time on someone else? But this woman did on Jesus, her Savior. Jesus silenced her detractors and proclaimed, **"She has done a beautiful thing to me"** (Mark 14:6). God made this event beautiful in its time and to this very day, for Jesus also said, **"Wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her"** (Mark 14:9). Right now, you and I are fulfilling that prophecy of Jesus. Isn't that neat?

Our Second Lesson spoke of the end of this sin-ruined world when God will make everything new. We miserable sinners are described as **"a bride beautifully dressed for her husband"** (Rv 21:2). And we didn't do a thing to make ourselves beautiful—no lotion, no cream, no make-up, no thoughts, no words, no actions could make us sinners and natural-born enemies of God beautiful in his sight. But Jesus did it all; he took away our sin and washed us clean; he dressed us in his robe of righteousness, and we are beautiful because of him.

God did this. God controls everything. In his infinite wisdom and power he fits everything into his eternal plan, and so **"everything is beautiful in its time."** Is there something ugly in your life right now? Is there something you are ashamed of? Is there something you keep locked away in the farthest back closet of your mind that makes you shudder and tremble when it tries to get out? Is some aspect of your life out of control? Are you or a loved one battling a nasty, perhaps terminal disease? Remember, God controls everything. He makes **"everything beautiful in its time."** The Apostle Paul, who endured more than a few trials in this life, wrote: **"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose"** (Ro 8:28). To see life's hardships and joys alike as part of this grand scheme of our Creator and Savior, is like viewing life as a beautiful mosaic from the hands of the master Artist.

Every good gift is from God. And what an awesome God he is! It is foolish to try to subtract or add to God's great plans for us. For example, there is nothing any one of us can add to God's plan of salvation. Good works add nothing to what Jesus has won for us. **"It is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast"** (Eph 2:8-9). And that is the most beautiful thing of all! That beauty is ours, but only because of God, **"who makes everything beautiful in its time."** Amen.