

Beauty

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] We're going to look this evening at the theme of beauty from Proverbs, but before we do so, now I'm a little bit more composed. Can I thank you for your surprise this morning and your kind words and your thoughts and your prayers. It's an honour to do what I'm been asked to do, though I make light of it. It is nonetheless a significant thing to do and I do covet your prayers and I value your support and I take comfort from knowing that I have the best congregation in the free church. Sorry about Dundee, but that's true. So I know that I will have your prayer support and I crave that. It's an interesting assembly that's coming up. There's a lot of exciting and good things happening, but there's a lot of difficult things happening as well. So we will need a great deal of wisdom as a church to move forward and pray that you'll continue to pray for the church and for me as moderator this year and the times that I'm away. I know you'll be supportive of that and we've got great support here while I'm away. So Katrina and I are very grateful for your kindness and generosity and support. So beauty, that is the theme and it's not a simple theme to extract from Proverbs. It is and it isn't. It works its way right through

Proverbs but it's not a clear cut text that we can take. But we're going to look at that theme this evening. But I think we always need to start by recognizing and knowing that in God's perfect and glorious creation which we know He made at the beginning, beauty has been compromised. So whenever we speak about beauty we need to recognize that it's been compromised because of the fall and because of sin in the world and the outstanding creativity and good imagination of God and His gift to humanity of a stunning creation and shared creative capability that we have as people has been hijacked by humanity in our sinful selfishness and has been often prostituted so that we can't fully understand beauty as it was originally intended for us. Yet we know and we appreciate beauty in this world that points us to the beautiful one, that points us to our God, our Creator God and we have redemption which gives us amazing hope for a greater and more glorious expression and enjoyment of beauty in relationship with Him and in the world that He's given us.

But we know that sin simply means that we've turned our backs on God and we turn our backs on God that means we've turned our backs on beauty as well in all its perfection. We've opened the door to beauty being distorted and deceived and misrepresented and destructive or destroyed in many different ways in this world and ugliness has become an unwelcome tenant in the world in which we live. So alongside beauty we recognize and see that sin has brought in ugliness into the world and that's the corollary, that's the opposite of the beauty of God's world. But I do think sometimes as Christians and maybe particularly Christians from our tradition that we are suspicious of sanctified imagination and beauty.

We regard it as a kind of risqué subject to move into Christians in pursuit of beauty in the arts or in music or in sport and in creation generally or maybe regarded with a bit of suspicion as if secondary only to a bare kind of soul salvation. And yet that in itself is very one dimensional and we struggle I think with the sheer extravagance and beauty and variety of the gifts and personalities God has given us. One of sin's failings I think is that we have a desire for everyone to be like us, to look like us and to think like us and that our version of beauty is the only version of beauty there is and it can be very confined and narrow and that becomes the lie of Satan in many ways as we make everything uniform and bland and simple without recognising the astonishing creativity and glory of our

God. So in this chapter we've gone back to chapter 8 and I think we've decided individually and together, Cori and myself and Tom we preach chapter 8 and 9 but particularly 8 is a kind of pivotal chapter of Proverbs, it's a core chapter for everything blossoms really from it in many ways and it speaks of wisdom and we've read this several times as we've introduced the subject of wisdom and folly and the fear of the Lord and it's an important chapter and in verse 30 of this chapter we have

this picture of wisdom at the beginning, we saw that before personified in the beginning of the world and he said then I was beside him like a master workman, we've got this picture of wisdom being God's craftsman in creation.

[6 : 11] So you've got this picture of wisdom personified as the creator of beauty, the creator of all of God's glorious creation that's listed and spoken of in the chapter that we read.

And when Cori preached on this chapter he brought that link between wisdom and wisdom's work and wisdom being personified here as the creator of beauty and moving it forward ultimately to linking the wisdom of God with the word of God and the word of God being most enfleshed in the person of Jesus Christ.

So we see Jesus in many ways and recognize Christ as the second person of the Trinity as the agent in creation, the great wise one who brought this world of marvelous beauty into being. In verse 30 we're told there that I was daily his delight rejoicing before him, I was rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of men.

So both the world that was created and humanity that was created within this world was a great delight and a great joy and a great pleasure for God to look on.

[7 : 30] So he saw this world and he saw us remarkably, it's beautiful, made in his own image, made us that way, made us with great beauty and great intricacy and great variety and reflecting his character.

So this great Trinitarian God that we worship through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, is the source of all the delegated beauty and creativity that we see in the world in which we live.

The art, the music, the craftsmanship, the architecture, the engineering, the fashion designers, sports people as they work out their creative gifts.

Because God is glorified through these things, it can be for us a source of great rejoicing and of great thankfulness. Cleesie asked his three, verse 11, says he made everything beautiful in its time. So we have that recognition and we have that knowledge that all good things, all things of great beauty come from and find our source in God.

[8 : 46] And Proverbs itself is a great illustration of that, as is the song of Solomon or as is the Cleesie astes or as Job is as well. These authors pull in God's creation to explain the character of God and to explain the glory of God.

Proverbs itself uses many things in creation to express different wisdom, truths especially animals, he talks about horses and bears and dogs and lions and lizards and lambs and deers and coney eagles and ants, swallows and eagles.

All are used by the author of Proverbs, Solomon the King and others to express and explain truths of God's world and God's wisdom.

And who can forget the, and I've often spoken of it here in church of the great picture from Job and as we went through Job and God, how do we think God would explain himself?

Great deep theological terms where he spoke in marvelous explanations of his deep ontological being, but yet he speaks about himself through his creation.

[10 : 02] Where were you when the world was, where were you? I was the one who made the storehouses as no one, then he speaks about the ostrich, stupid animal.

Ostrich, not given much wisdom, but when he spreads his wings he laughs at a horse and rider, that most magnificent picture of God who knows and sees and understands his creation and recognizes it in all its beauty.

But of course it would be unwise for us to stop there because we recognize that there is also within Proverbs and then with God's word this great recognition of folly and the deceptiveness of what folly has done and taken from God and from his word and from his original creation and destroyed it. Proverbs 31 where Corrie read from the wife of noble character, great chapter, great passage, but it ends with that section which says charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting.

And so there's a recognition there of a misunderstanding of beauty and a recognition that beauty in and of itself as sometimes we accept it in its distortion because of sin is not the answer for us in our lives.

[11 : 31] In our rebellion we've stolen beauty. We've stolen God's beauty and we've ripped it and taken it from its roots so that at best it's a fading flower.

It does have life but it won't last because it's been torn from its maker, it's been torn from its source, it's been torn from its God. So there is beauty there but it is fading and it is passing and sin has

done that to beauty and we need to recognize that and try and redeem that as we understand it. See as sin closes the door in God and therefore as the door is closed then God is neither acknowledged as the giver or the author of beauty and he's not thanked or worshiped. And immediately it's taken out of its context, immediately it's ripped from its roots and beauty becomes something that it was never intended to be. Beauty itself becomes the thing that is worshiped rather than God so that in Romans 1, 25 which I think is up on the screen, or it will be, we've got that because they exchanged the truth of God, about God for a lion, worshipped and served the creature that rather than the Creator who is blessed forever. I mean, and that's what's turned around in this world, is that rather than worshipping the Creator of beauty, we worship beauty itself and we make that an end in itself. [13:05] It loses therefore its divine depth and it is in danger of being only skin deep. A well-known phrase to us isn't it?

Beauty that's skin deep, it's shallow. That end in itself when what can be seen, what is visible, what is attractive to us is all that matters.

And we live in that world, do we? We live in that world today, more than ever, where image is everything, where what we see is everything, where wisdom and God's definition of beauty is rejected because it's too demanding because it exposes the ugliness and selfish and sinful appetites of our own hearts.

But beauty is shallow when it's ripped from its roots in God so that we live in a society where sex sells, sex sells, beauty sells, looks count for so much.

They are so significant in terms of human beauty moving away from the world itself to us. And it becomes something, beauty becomes something to be owned, to be controlled, to be what satisfies our appetites.

[14:25] And it becomes something that is all-obsessing in our lives. Physical beauty is worshiped and is sought after more than anything. And embarrassingly manufactured as we get older to maintain youthfulness and to maintain some facade of youthful beauty because that's all there is, the fear of losing youth.

And that surface beauty that is so important in our society exposes the vanity of much of our lives and much of our thinking.

And we get sucked into that as Christians. And easily get sucked into thinking that beauty is only skin deep. So that beauty has been overtaken so often by ugliness which is exposed in this broken world in which we live.

And so we see beauty being scarred and destroyed, don't we? We see it in the planet. We see it in animal cruelty. We see it in war and destruction.

Of all we see it in the way we hate, in the way we gossip, in the way we destroy one another and mock one another and violate one another and cheapen one another.

[15:39] And ultimately we see it in the ugliness of death which is the opposite of all the beauty and life and creativity and energy that God initially and originally created for us.

It tears apart and it breaks and is desperate in its ugliness. So we take the beauty that is spoken of in Proverbs chapter 8 as personified in wisdom and in wisdom delighting in God's creation.

And we recognize that that hope of a renewed recognition of beauty can only be fulfilled in Christ and in Christ's redemption.

In Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 7, in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace. So we have this picture of Jesus Christ in all His richness, in all His graceful, glorious provision for us in redemption, and His beauty is evident. It is an amazing, rich, glorious, beautiful redemption that He has purchased for us. We see it in His character and we see it in His work.

[16:57] Now, Jesus Christ by God's standard is the most beautiful person who ever lived, okay, in His whole character, most beautiful person who ever lived.

Only though, that didn't make Him look like a God, I don't think. It didn't make Him kind of glow, apart from in the Transfiguration, and that was different.

He simply, He looked like us. I don't think as He grew up, people looked Him and said, my, He's the most beautiful specimen who ever lived and He must be a God.

He just grew up and His beauty was not what we judge beauty as being. I don't think He stood out physically on the surface in any way.

In fact, Isaiah speaks of Him as being one who was despised and rejected. He had no beauty that we should desire Him. There wasn't the kind of outward marks of beauty that humanity gauged people by.

[18:07] His beauty, and He had beauty, but it was despised and was rejected. People referred to John 3.19 says that this is the judgment, that light is coming to the world, beautiful light, but that people loved the darkness rather than the light for their deeds were evil.

So interestingly, in our sinfulness, true beauty to us is something we recoil from. It's something that we find a great challenge to us, and that's a challenge to you and me in our Christian lives when we tend to dovetail in our thinking with the world and think that the world's concept and our natural concept of beauty is all that matters.

And yet Christ was rejected because people found His light too bright, too exposing.

The standard of beauty too great, and they preferred the darkness of their own one-dimensional, narrow-minded, sinful, flat version of life and beauty.

So He was the most beautiful of all human beings, yet He was despised and rejected. And though He was so beautiful, we find that He is crucified in the ugliest place of all.

[19:37] Calvary, now it's a bit paradoxical, Calvary is both the greatest, the most ugly place of all, but also a place for Christians of great beauty. It's darkest, the blue-kissed place of all, where the light went out on the beauty of God, the sun.

But even the Father wouldn't look on the sun, and the sun wouldn't shine on the moment because there was so much ugliness there as He became sin for us.

Forsaken, cast out, experiencing hell, and all that is ugly and all that is dark and all that is awful, yet paradoxically a place of great beauty for us.

Because that great transaction happened where love and justice meet, and where rescue and redemption is won.

And it's where we can recapture and understand true beauty through the Holy Spirit and live true beauty. And that brings me to, we looked at very loosely going through Proverbs in many ways here, but seeing it as part of the ongoing redemptive revelation of God.

[20:54] We've seen the beauty of the Lord as it's revealed in Christ who's the Word, the great personification of God's wisdom and God's redemption for us. But we also remember that in salvation the people of God are the bride of Christ.

In 21 verse 2, it says, hopefully, no, okay, I'll look it up.

I only gave these texts very late on. I thought I'd given them and I hadn't. And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And it's that great picture of the beauty of the church redeemed as a bride prepared for her husband, the Savior, the Redeemer, God.

Now, I may be wrong exegetically here. I'm the moderator this year. No. So, no, so I'm taking that bride of Christ, okay, that's spoken of in Revelation 21, and I'm applying it to the noble wife of Proverbs 31.

[22:15] Because the noble wife we have, if you remember for whom Proverbs was written, we believe it was written for young men, young men of the royal house.

And there is wisdom that is given to them for life and what greater wisdom than looking for a wife of noble character for the young prince.

And in many ways, what we have here is an idealized personification of the wise wife, the beautiful wife.

It can be applied to marriage. It can be applied to wife. I believe it could be applied to husband. It can be applied to individuals. But I believe perfectly it's applied to the redeemed church, the bride of Christ.

So it applies to every believer, the ultimate bride, the bride of Christ. And we find in here the personification of absolute beauty, of beauty redeemed, beauty in Christ.

[23:23] And we are to strive with the Holy Spirit, with our new hearts and our new beings to live beautifully.

And to strive after the beauty that is revealed in this passage. Strive because we have the energy and we have the life of God enabling us and His forgiveness.

It is priceless beauty. It is much, much deeper than skin. It is the retaking. It's the recapturing of our whole being for God.

For all that we are, it's a picture, if you go through that passage, it's a picture of someone who trusts in the Lord, who is loving, who is wise, who is merciful, who is energetic.

This is where all the beauty comes in. Who is creative, who is imaginative, who is entrepreneurial, who is strong, who is hard working, who is generous, who is protective, who is an educator.

[24 : 28] And it's a picture of something far greater than just outward beauty that we often make judgments on, isn't it? Don't we often judge people just by what they look like?

And here is this character of great beauty and it comes from within 1 Samuel 16,7. Did they get that one? I did great. The Lord, the old text, the Lord said, Do not look on His appearance or on the height of His stature because I've rejected Him.

For the Lord sees not as man sees, man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. And that's the great difference, isn't it, between us and our sinful natures and what we ought to be as believers, we ought to see beyond the surface, we ought to see beyond the gossip, beyond what is an instinctive judgment on someone's character, and also we should not seek to portray ourselves in that shallow light to others.

It's only what they see. It's only how we portray ourselves. It's only what we look like on paper. He says, No, as Christians, there is something far greater, something far deeper, and this wife of noble character as a reflection of the bride of Christ is an exegesis, an explanation of grace at work in our lives.

I wonder if this is a glimpse of what we will be like in heaven and what heaven will be like. I think it is education, entrepreneurship, imagination, creativity, energy, retaking of the whole person, love, wisdom, and mercy.

[26 : 22] So much of what we call beauty today is deceptive and fleeting. You are asked, and I am asked to repent from all that is ugly, all that is ugly inside, all this stuff of selfishness, bitterness, and pride, and ignorance, and the things that sometimes we enjoy and we embrace and we incubate.

We foster and we nourish and we rub its back and we encourage, and he says, No, God recoils from all of that.

Recoils from all of the ugliness that might be very important in society in which we live, but is skin deep. So we recognize that the beauty of the bride is genuine beauty, and genuine beauty should also be something for which we are thankful and a heart that gives thanks to God, a recognition that he is the author and he is the giver and Psalm 106 verse, give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love endures forever, and all the beauty that comes from him.

And you know, I was reading this week something about, I have no idea where and I have no idea what it was, and it's probably just not genuine, but there was something I was reading that was saying, if you are a thankful person, it is good for you physically and psychologically, because it makes you humble and it makes you recognize your dependence on others and your thankfulness for what you have.

And that of course is we are created to be thankful. We are created to have this healthy perspective to value God, to worship Him and to glorify Him, for all He is and for all His creativity and for all His beauty, and above all for the beauty of the cross.

[28 : 28] And so then, as we close, let's be people who live lives of, I hesitate to say spiritual beauty, I just mean beauty, that includes the spiritual and the physical.

It is living that life of beauty, it is what we are called to do, and dwell be the spirit of wisdom and beauty, obeying the laws of love, which are love your God and love your neighbor.

It's the beauty of holiness. It's not cheap, this is not shallow, this is not soft-soaping the true gospel.

This is the gospel that we live this beauty, this beauty that is radically different, that is a life of repentance and faith that is plugged into God through prayer and through the Word, that sees Him in His living Word and looks beyond the surface.

And so in our churches, we are not people that make judgments on the surface and judge people's beauty on the surface, that we embrace the beauty of the heart and the graceful life and we see beyond that, and we live and we look for transformed hearts and embrace the beauty in art and in music and in culture and in everyone's individual gifts and everyone being different, isn't that good? I want people to be the same, I just want everyone to look like me and be like me, because that would make things easier and I would understand life more. No, let's worship and praise and thank God for our diversity and for the variety of our gifts and see the hand of God in them and rejoice in

that under Christ.

[30 : 14] Praise Him for common grace at points. We seek that to point others to the Creator, but more than the Creator, the Redeemer, the Savior who in the ugliness of Calvary births the most beautiful salvation.

Amen, let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that You would help us to understand Your beauty, forgive us for being so shallow, for being taken up by surface beauty, often the beauty that breaks marriages and breaks relationships and leads to adultery and leads to selfishness and leads to lust and pride and ugliness, a shallow beauty that is self-centered and about receiving rather than giving and is about taking control of rather than giving glory to God.

Help us for thinking Your salvation is plain and ordinary when it is really so multifaceted and deep and beautiful and relevant and meaningful and true.

And help us to worship You in the beauty of Your holiness and remind ourselves that we often are attracted to the darkness rather than the light.

We reject Your beauty because of its great standards and because of its brightness and because of our love of darkness.

[31 : 51] Forgive us for that, Lord. Forgive us for above all trying to hide that by an outward sophistication or an outward religiosity to try and cover up and help us to be honest and rejoice in Your beauty and rejoice in who You are and what You have done for us and what You will do for us and what the new heavens and the new earth will look like in all its beauty and all its provision.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.