

Beauty for Ashes

by Chuck Smith

Chuck Smith's sermon 'Beauty for Ashes' emphasizes the transformative power of Jesus' resurrection, turning sorrow into joy for believers.

Duration: 41:48

Scripture: John 20:1-4, John 20:11-18

Topics: "Brokenness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the theme of beauty for ashes, emphasizing how Jesus came to bring joy and hope to those who are mourning and burdened. The speaker highlights the story of two young girls who witnessed the destruction and oppression in the world, and how their hearts went out to them. The sermon also addresses the issue of burned-out lives, particularly among young people who have made wrong choices and fallen into drug addiction. The speaker emphasizes the need for a renewed sense of purpose and the hope that comes from the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Transcript

Let's turn in our Bibles now to John, the Gospel according to John, chapter 20. For our scripture reading today, I'll read the first, the unnumbered verses. Pastor Brian will lead the congregation through the even-numbered verses through verse 18.

John 20, 1 through 18. Shall we stand as we read the Word of God? The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciples whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.

Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and they came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together, and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying, yet went he not in.

Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie. And the napkin that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw and believed.

For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping, and as she wept, she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

And they said unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? And she said unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. And Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? And she supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if you have borne him hence, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.

Jesus saith unto her, Mary, she turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni, which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father. But go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and to your Father, and to my God, and your God.

Mary Magdalene came, and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her. Let's pray. Father, it's a story that never grows old, but always fills us with excitement and with hope.

The story of the conquering of death by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And Lord, we thank you that you have given to us the promise that because you live, we too shall live. And we thank you, Lord, that through the power of your Spirit that dwells in us, we too shall rise to immortality through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, we're so grateful that you have given us this living hope today. Speak now, Lord, to our hearts through your Word. Open our hearts to receive.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You may be seated.

We'll turn back just a couple of chapters to John chapter 16. And in verse 20, Jesus is talking to his disciples on the evening before his crucifixion. They had observed the Passover supper in the upper room, probably somewhere on Mount Zion.

They had left the upper room now and were walking together to the Garden of Gethsemane there at the Mount of Olives. They had passed by the temple, had seen the gates with the carved grapes on them, which probably prompted Jesus to say in chapter 15, I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman. In every branch in me that beareth fruit, he washes it that it might bring forth more fruit.

Now as they continue probably leaving the city walls out either the East Gate or St. Stephen's, entering into the Valley of the Kidron and up the other side to the Garden, Jesus continues to talk with them. He's trying to prepare them for the next morning when they are going to see him hanging on a cross. Their concept of the Messiah was so different.

They had believed that the Messiah was going to overthrow the Roman government, that he would sit upon the throne of David and that he would rule over the world. And the idea that he would be despised and rejected, the thought that he would be crucified was the furthest thing from their concept of the Messiah. And though Jesus had been trying to prepare them for this, ever since they acknowledged that he was the Messiah, somehow it just didn't sink in.

Yes, the Messiah shall reign. Yes, the Messiah will be King of Kings and Lord of Lords and rule over the earth, but that awaits his second coming. In his first coming, he was to be despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows acquainted with grief.

In his first coming, he was to be rejected by the builders, but later he would become the chief cornerstone. And though in the Old Testament there were those predictions of his suffering, of his death, wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, yet they didn't really conceive that that would happen to the Messiah. And so Jesus was trying to prepare them, because he knew that his death would be such a tremendous disappointment.

Not really understanding the Scriptures, it was to be to them the end of all of their hopes of the Kingdom of God. From the first time that they acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of living God, there in Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus said, who do people think I am? And they told him all of the rumors that were going about around the area about him. He said, but who do you say that I am? Peter answered and said, you're the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

And from that time, Jesus began to talk to his disciples, telling them that he would have to go to Jerusalem. He would suffer many things from the chief priest and from the scribes, and he would be killed. But on the third day, he would rise again.

Peter began to rebuke him, shame on you, don't talk like that. And Jesus had to rebuke Peter, saying, Peter, you don't really understand the things that are coming from God and the things that are coming from man. Peter was talking out of his own heart.

He had ambitions. He was planning to have a great position. The Lord had chosen him.

And surely when he sets up his kingdom, Peter will be able to have a position of authority and power in the kingdom. And he was looking forward to this. And when Jesus starts to talk about being crucified, being killed, at that point, his mind just shut off.

It was such a shocking revelation. He didn't hear the rest of what Jesus said. He didn't hear him say, but on the third day, I will rise again.

That just went over because the shock of Jesus saying, they're going to crucify me. That's all he heard. In Matthew 17, he records that while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, the son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men.

They will kill him. But the third day, he will rise again. And they were exceedingly sorry.

Again, they just didn't hear. He will rise again. In Matthew chapter 20, again, Jesus was going to Jerusalem and he took the 12 disciples apart in the way.

And he said to them, behold, we're going to Jerusalem and the son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priest and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death. And they will deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify him. And the third day he shall rise again.

And then in verse 28 of chapter 20 of Matthew, even as the son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life as a ransom for many, trying to prepare them, trying to prepare them for the shock that they're going to have when they see him crucify. Finally, in Matthew 26 verse 2, he said to

them, you know that after two days is the feast of the Passover and the son of man will be betrayed and will be crucified. Now they have come to the eve of the crucifixion.

The last supper is over. They're on the way to the garden of Gethsemane where he will pray and later be arrested, taken to the house of the high priest, condemned by the spiritual court because he claimed to be the son of God, brought early in the morning to Pilate. And there upon the insistence of the people, Pilate succumbs to the pressure and delivers Jesus to them to be crucified.

And at nine o'clock, he'll be hanging upon the cross. And around three o'clock in the afternoon, his body will go limp as he bows his head and dismisses his spirit. And their hearts will be heavy with grief.

Their hopes will be dashed to pieces. And so Jesus said to them in John 16 20, Verily, verily, I say unto you, you shall weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.

And in verse 22, And now will you have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man can take from you. So now, just before he prays and is arrested, he is saying to the disciples, you're going to weep, you're going to lament. The world around you will be rejoicing.

You're going to be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. When Isaiah the prophet was anointed by the spirit of God and prophesying concerning the Messiah that would be coming some 700 years later. In speaking of the Messiah, Isaiah said, The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted and to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those that are bound, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of the vengeance of our God, to comfort all that mourn, to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion to give them beauty for their ashes, the oil of joy for their mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they might be called the trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified. As Isaiah sees the Messiah in this passage, we realize that this is referring to Jesus. When Jesus after his baptism came back to his hometown of Nazareth, went into the synagogue, and when they handed him the scriptures to read, he turned in the Isaiah scroll to this particular passage, and he read this passage to those that were in the synagogue, and then having read it, he said, This day has this scripture been fulfilled in your eyes, declaring that he was the promised Messiah.

Now, these are the things that Isaiah said the Messiah would do. First of all, he would bind up the brokenhearted. There are so many people today in the world with broken hearts.

Many of them have hearts that are broken over dashed relationships. Many of them have hearts that are broken because of the loss of loved ones, a husband, a wife, a mother, a father, a son, a daughter. Many have broken hearts because of the serious illness of close friends.

Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted. He came, Isaiah said, to comfort those who mourn. And again, the sorrow of the world.

And how many people today are mourning because of the loss of reputation, the loss of a job, the loss of a friend, the loss of a loved one. He came to comfort those that mourn. It says he came to bring beauty for ashes.

It is to me a very tragic thing to see a person whose life has been burned out. You see them pushing the market basket down the street with all of their possessions in that basket. You see their eyes, the hopelessness that is there.

My heart is always touched when I see a burned out life and even more so when it's a young person. And I have seen so many young people, even as early as their teens, whose lives are already burned out. They made a wrong turn.

They yielded to the pressures. They started taking drugs and the drugs soon took them. And sometimes the overdosing, destroying their brains.

And you see them with their dirty clothes, walking the streets with matted hair. They try to look like they know where they're going and they try to look like they have purpose in life. But you look at their eyes, they're vacant.

Nobody's home. And your heart grieves. You think you're so young.

You should be thinking about marriage, about a family, about a career. But your lives are already burned out. We've seen so many.

But Jesus came to give beauty for ashes. And we have also watched those whose lives were burned out and we saw how the Lord transformed them and has given them beauty for the ashes. I think of Mike McIntosh when he first came to us.

Handsome young fellow, but burned out. He had already taken so many drugs that had destroyed his brain. The psychiatrists had written him off.

They said, there's no hope for him. He's destroyed too many of his brain cells. And when he first came, he kept saying, take a look at my brain.

Just at the back there, look at my brain. And he thought the skull was gone and you could actually see his brain burned out, talking incoherently. But we saw Jesus touch his life.

We saw the transformation that only Jesus can bring. We saw Jesus restore his marriage. I had the privilege of remarrying Mike and Sandy.

Their two beautiful little girls were the flower girls in that wedding. And what a day that was, as we were all of us crying over the wonderful work of Jesus giving beauty for ashes. And I look at the beautiful life today.

How God is using Mike to touch the world. His tremendous crusades, the festivals for life, and just the many ministries that have actually sprung out of his ministry. And what beauty I see in that life today.

You see, that's what Jesus came to bring. Beauty for ashes. He came to give us the oil of joy for our mourning.

And he is able to turn our mourning into joy. He came to give us the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. And how many times people are going around with heavy hearts, discouraged about life, sort of given up hope.

And Jesus gives to us that garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. In John 16, Jesus is saying to the disciples, you're going to be weeping and lamenting while the world around you is rejoicing. And when they watch him as he is hanging on the cross, and they realize that when he was talking about his being put to death, he wasn't talking allegorically, but of an actual experience that would take place.

Their hopes were dashed. They have lost their will to live. And don't you know, that Sabbath day as they sat around, heads hanging low, their whole lives have been disrupted, fractured.

Their hopes for the future have been shattered. How do you begin again? How do you go back and pick up the broken pieces? Where do you start? As Jesus joined the two disciples that resurrection day, as they were walking towards the village of Emmaus, their heads are down. I can see them as they're walking along kicking rocks and just downhearted, downtrodden.

And Jesus sort of sits up besides them and says, fellows, what kind of conversations do you have as you're walking along here? You look so dejected. And they said, are you the only one around here who doesn't know the things that have been going on in Jerusalem in the last few days? He said, what things? And they began to relate how there was a man, Jesus, he was from Nazareth. And he went around doing good, healing all manner of sicknesses.

And then in the past tense, they said, and we hoped in him for the salvation of Israel. But it was past tense. We had hoped it's no longer, we don't, he was crucified.

This is the third day. Oh, some women came from the tomb this morning and said that the stone was rolled away. But you know how women can get hysterical and all of that.

Jesus said, oh, fools and slow of heart to believe all that the scriptures say. And he started with Moses. And he began to unfold the scriptures that spoke about the suffering of the Messiah.

He took them through the prophets and he showed them how that this had to be. And as he was talking to them out of the scriptures later, they said, did not our hearts burn within us as he spoke to us in the way. That hope that had been dashed, suddenly it was reviving.

The fire that had been quenched is being rekindled. They're beginning to see. And as he breaks bread with them, their eyes are open.

Probably they saw the nail prints as he broke the bread. They realized it's Jesus. Then he disappeared.

They went running back to Jerusalem. They saw the disciples and they cried out, he is risen. And the disciples responded, he is risen indeed.

He appeared unto Mary and unto the women and unto Peter. And that became really one of the cries of the early church. As they would greet each other, they'd say, he is risen.

And the other would respond, he is risen indeed. The hope that had been dashed is now alive again. Their sorrow has been turned into joy, even as Jesus said, and the joy no one will be able to take from you.

What a difference a day makes from the Sabbath day of complete gloom and sorrow, to the Sunday morning, to the day of joy and blessing. Your sorrow will be turned into joy. When the women came to the tomb, the angel almost was rebuking them.

He said, why are you seeking the living among the dead? What are you doing here? Why would you seek for he that is living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen just as he said. He is telling them, look, this is what he told you.

Don't you remember? He is risen just as he said. What a contrast of emotions, from deepest sorrow to highest joy. But what brought them the sorrow? It was their failure to believe the words of Jesus.

Had they listened and had they believed, they would not have sorrowed. Because over and over he said, they're going to crucify me, but the third day I will rise again. Now it's interesting, they just seem not to catch that.

But what's interesting to me is that the enemies of Jesus caught that. When Jesus had been placed into the tomb, they came to Pilate and they said, look, now this deceiver said he was going to rise again the third day. So make certain that that can't happen.

Seal the tomb. And Pilate had enough of them. He said, you've got your own, you know, authority.

You go seal it. But they could not keep him in the tomb. And so when they came, the sorrow, because of their unbelief, when they saw the evidence of the risen Lord, their sorrow was turned into joy.

Unbelief will keep you weeping when you should be rejoicing. Not believing God's word can cause you great anxiety and sorrow when you should have confidence and hope. The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

He came to give beauty for ashes. And today he can give you beauty for your ashes. He came to give the oil of joy to those who were mourning and he is able to anoint you with that oil of joy.

He came to give a garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness and he can turn your heaviness into rejoicing. It is the resurrection that changed everything. Resurrection Sunday is more than just the resurrection of Jesus.

It was a resurrection of their joy. It was a resurrection of their hope. To some people today, Jesus is still in the grave.

They have no hope for the future. They have no hope of life after death. They have put their whole life in this world.

And now this world is falling apart. There are millions of Muslims throughout the world today who are dedicated to your destruction. Israel is really the front line of defense in this war that has been declared by the militant Muslims against the world.

And the militant Muslims have declared first the Sabbath keepers and then the Sunday keepers. What they're saying is that after they have destroyed Israel, they plan to destroy the Christians. They plan to destroy America.

They have declared war against you. Millions of them are devoted to the destruction of Christianity, your world. They're called terrorists because they can inspire terror in the hearts of people by their indiscriminate killing of innocent people.

Several years ago when we were in Israel, we were staying at a kibbutz right up on the northern border next to Lebanon. And as we were eating in the kibbutz, we had these young girls that were serving us. And I noticed that they were wearing a cross.

And I said to them, I don't quite understand. You're in a Jewish kibbutz, but you are wearing a cross. And they said, oh well, we are from Lebanon.

We are here for our own safety. The Hezbollah and all have infiltrated. Our parents were shot by them.

And they told us of the atrocities that they saw. How that the terrorist, these Hezbollah, would throw a baby into the air and then shoot it and try to keep it hanging in the air with their shots. And these girls, as they would tell us these stories of the things that they had seen, our hearts went out to them.

They know the type of people who are dedicated to the destruction of the Western world. And those who have put everything into this world, it's falling apart at the seams. And if your hope is in this world only, you've got to be the most miserable of all people.

Our hope is in a better world. Jesus, who died and rose again, is going to come. He is going to stop the oppression.

He is going to establish the kingdom of God. This is my father's world. The battle isn't over yet.

Jesus, who died and was crucified, shall be the ruler yet. And our hope and our joy is in Jesus Christ. A joy that no man can take from us.

Resurrection Sunday. What a glorious day. The day that brought hope.

The day that assured of life. For our Lord is risen from the dead. Let's pray.

Father, how grateful we are for another Resurrection Sunday in which we can rejoice in the triumph of Jesus over the grave, over death, over hell. And Lord, we thank you for turning our sorrow into joy, our ashes into something beautiful, our mourning into rejoicing. Lord, there are those here today living in this dark world as Paul describes them, without hope, without God, without Christ.

We pray, Father, that though they may have come in that condition, as they leave, they will leave transformed by the Spirit of God. Their ashes turned into beauty, their hopelessness into a glorious hope, a living hope because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. These things we pray, Father, in the lovely name of Jesus our Lord.

Amen. Shall we stand? The pastors are down here at the front this morning. If you'd like to really know what living is all about, real living, Jesus died to give you life, true life.

And I would encourage you as soon as we're dismissed, come on forward. Maybe you're going through a heavy time in life. Maybe there's a lot of confusion.

Maybe there's a lot of sorrow. But your sorrow can be turned into joy. Jesus wants to transform your life today.

All he needs is just the invitation. Just for you to say, Lord, come into my life. Be the Lord of my life.

I give myself to you today. And you can know that transforming power of God. For if that same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he will make you alive to the things of the Spirit, a whole new dimension of life, life in the Spirit.

These men are down here to pray with you and to pray for you, to answer questions, and to help you to discover the real joy of Resurrection Sunday by discovering Jesus Christ and the life that he brings. May the Lord be with you. May you have a blessed day of fellowship with him as you live and walk with our living Savior, Jesus Christ.

The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.

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