**Text: Isaiah 61:1-3**

**Subject: You Are So Beautiful To Me!**

 Family, currently we are in a time of mourning, the likes of which we have never seen before. In fact, during these times, we are experiencing mourning on top of mourning.

 What that means is that our mourning is becoming layered and compacted because as soon as we try to process the loss someone or something, then we are being forced to process the loss of someone or something else.

 Of course, the obvious culprit is the virus which is still running rampant even though some government officials are swiftly moving to open the economy as if nothing is happening. Because of that, more and more people are satisfying their selfish desires to get out of the house to go and do what they want to do and as a result, more and more people are being infected which means more and people, especially of color, are dying all around us.

 To add insult to injury, in our community, we do not seem to be taking this thing seriously—perhaps because we were already grief-stricken prior to this pandemic due to the many losses that we have incurred since we arrived on the shores of Fort Monroe, Virginia in 1619.

 Therefore, on the one hand, perhaps the continuous and cumulative impact of our mourning has caused us to be numb to the sting of death that has been stinging our hearts like the sting of the oversized so-called murder hornets that are reportedly coming our way.

 However, on the other hand, perhaps our mourning has gone underground and has begun to morph into other forms of neurosis to include chronic fear, worry, anxiety and now anger, in our community because we have never really had the opportunity simply be free from the injustices which have been levied against us for more than 400 years.

 For example, we can’t even begin to recount the many stories—told and untold—of how our African ancestors were brutally violated and killed throughout the several centuries of slavery.

 Then, our freed Brothers and Sisters were hung like strange fruit from trees; unjustifiably worked on the chain gangs; died, one way or the other, during the crack epidemic; and brothers have been mass-incarcerated. And now, we are being shot down in the streets because we are driving while black; walking while black; or even jogging while black.

 Even more, we are dying at alarming and disproportionate rates higher than any other cultural group from the Coronavirus and other viruses that were ravaging our community long before corona should up.

 As a result, our community is hurting and mourning in ways that we cannot even begin to express-- and because we are not dealing with it—it is dealing with us in very treacherous and destructive ways internally and externally.

 Therefore, you might be saying to yourselves, what can we do about it especially since our mourning has gone on long for so long? Or is there any hope for any help especially since things just seem to be getting worse? Well, if you are asking these questions or if you have drawn these conclusions, then there is some good news.

 Well, if we look to our text, in Isaiah 61:3, we see that God appointed 3 things to the Children of Israel when they were in a time of mourning and as a result, those same four things apply us now during our time of mourning. (READ)

 First things first, in the Hebrew, to appoint means that God has put a plan in place that is designed to bring comfort and peace to people who are in mourning. It is a sure shot, spiritually proven plan which will work when it is received and when it is allowed to work.

 Now, the first thing God has given is **Beauty for Ashes**. For the Israelites, it was not uncommon for them to put ashes on their foreheads as a sign that they were in a season of mourning. Those ashes would accompanied with weeping, wailing and moaning. So if you could imagine the dark and dismal image of seeing a whole nation with ashes on their foreheads, and imagine the sounds of masses of humanity weeping, then that might accurately reflect what a season of mourning looks like and sounds like.

 And if we think about it, this image is not that hard imagine because that’s what this nation, and our community seems to be going through right now.

However, instead wearing ashes on the outside, we are wearing ashes on the inside of our foreheads and as a result, too many people are thinking dark thoughts and are beginning to believe too bad reports. And because of that, some of us are starting to feel like we are losing our minds.

 In other words, these times are some dark and ugly times. However, in the midst of all of this ugliness, God has given us some beauty.

 For the Israelites, God gave them a beautiful paronomasia which was so beautiful on a spiritual level that there are no words in the English dictionary to describe how beautiful it was. However, the best way to describe this beauty was to think of a tiara, or a crown that is filled with jewels.

And in the supernatural realm, God was seeking to provide the Israelites with a supernatural mourning exchange program where God would symbolically exchange the ashes on their foreheads and then give them a crown jewels to wear instead.

In other words, God seeking to take the ugliness of their mourning and grief and give them the beauty of His presence in return. Church, not only was the beauty of God’s presence available to them, it is also available to us.

We know this is true because King David said in Psalm 27:4, one thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple.

Then, Psalm 50:2 says, out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shined.

Therefore, we can conclude that the presence of God is so beautiful that it is perfect.

However, this might be hard for us to conceptualize because everyone has a different perspective on what’s beautiful and what’s not. In fact, the very definition of beauty is: the quality in a person or thing that is pleasant to the senses, or something or someone that exalts the mind or spirit. It is also defined as something excellent.

And since it is such a subjective concept, I believe God gave an example of beauty when he gave us our mothers. In other words, mothers are all of that and more and as a result, I am sure none of us would hesitate to call our mothers beautiful and that is true whether our mothers are still with us in body or if they are still with us in our memories. Either way, today, I am sure we can all sing: You Are So Beautiful To Me.

We can sing this song because indeed, because not only do mothers are the example of beauty on earth in a visual way, they are also the image of beauty in a visceral way.

In other words, it is the very essence of motherhood to do whatever they can do, to give whatever they can give, and to be there for us in every way that they can be. That’s beautiful!

Also, in a visceral way, mother’s are beautiful because they love so deeply and so completely. Because of that, sometimes, Mother’s Day can be a difficult day for those who have lost their mothers or for those mothers who have lost one of some of their children. That love lingers and it is painful to deal with the earthly realities of losing someone that we so deeply love.

Therefore, God didn’t just stop at giving us beauty for ashes. Instead, He also gave us the Oil of Joy for mourning. Now, in the natural, in Biblical days, fragrant oil was worn by celebrants celebrating festive times like weddings and other festivals. However, these fragrant oils were not supposed to be worn in times of mourning because for them, you were supposed to make a spectacle of your mourning.

As a result, it would have been out of place to put on fragrant oil during a time of mourning. However, in a supernatural sense, God was saying to the Israelites, and to us, that He would replace the sting and stench of mourning and replace it with the swell-smelling aroma of joy.

Simply put, according to Psalm 104:15, God was going to give them, and us, a wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man’s heart.

In essence, according to Psalm 45:7, God has anointed us with the oil of gladness, that will bring us up and out of our darkness, and will bring us up and out of our despair.

Also, in Psalm 23:5, King David said, thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

This oil will make us glad because it is the anointing; or rather the smearing of God’s presence into our hearts, our minds, and our souls.

Perhaps, that’s why the Prophet Isaiah told us in Isaiah 61:1 that the Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.

While God did mean this in a natural sense, He more so meant this in a supernatural sense. And what that means is that God has made it possible for us to be free from our mourning; to be free from our weeping and wailing; and to be free from darkness and despair because of His presence being smeared on the inside of our foreheads; and on the inside of our hearts and souls.

Now, I don’t know about you, but That’s Beautiful!

And lastly, it’s Beautiful that God has given us another way to get out of our season of mourning. In our text, in Isaiah 61:3, it says, God has appointed to us the Garment of Praise for the spirit of heaviness.

Now, this appointed gift is a gift that we must put on. It is like having a coat in the closet that we can put on whenever it is cold. However, if we don’t put it on, we will continue to experience the sting of the cold which stifles us and keeps us stuck from moving forward in our lives.

Therefore, first, putting on the Garment of Praise requires that we realize that we are walking in the midst of a cold, and dark world system which is set up to keep us in darkness, heaviness and despair.

Then, we must acknowledge that we have been negatively impacted by the spirit of heaviness—that our hearts our heavy; that we have some heavy stuff on our minds, collectively and individually. And then, we have to be willing to do something about it even if we don’t know what to do.

Well, one thing we know we can do, even if we can’t do anything else is, surely, we can praise The Lord.

We can go to Him, and ask Him to help us to get rid of this spirit of doom and gloom; and get rid of this spirit of heaviness that is weighing us down.

And then, we can go to our prayer closets, and make an exchange for our spirit of heaviness and then locate our garments of praise.

We look in our hearts, and say God where is that old coat of praise that I wore after you brought me up and out of that situation that You brought me and out of before.

Oh you that coat, you put on when God healed your body;

Or that coat you put on when God moved in your family;

Yes, that coat, you put on when God made a way out of no way.

Let me just say, that we don’t have to wait to put on the Garment of Praise until God moves. Instead, we can put on that Garment of Praise before God moves.

Yes, I know it doesn’t make any sense. But then again, what God has already done doesn’t make any sense.

Because what I haven’t said is that the Prophet Isaiah was really p about prophesying about The Lord Jesus Christ.

Because if you recall, the first thing The Lord Jesus said, when He first began His public, earthly ministry, in Luke 4:18 was:

The Spirit of Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives; and the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them; that are bruised.

Then, in verse 21, He went to say, this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

In other words, it is He who was appointed to give beauty for ashes!

And it is He, who is the Oil of Joy for our mourning!

And it is He, who is the Garment of praise, for the spirit of heaviness!

Therefore, we have a lot to praise God for, because it is He who so loved the world that He gave us His only begotten Son, that whoever shall believe on Him, shall not perish but have everlasting life.

Therefore, today, we can sing, You Are So Beautiful To Me!

Because over two thousand years ago, the Lord Jesus Christ, never said a mumbling word when they hung Him high,

And when they stretched Him wide.

He never complained when they nailed Him in His hands, and pierced Him in His side.

Church, the Lord Jesus never waivered when He hung His head and died.

Church, He did not come down off the cross until they took Him down, and put Him in an old borrowed tomb.

He even stayed there for one night, and then He stayed there for another night;

However, early in the morning, on that 3rd Day, He got up!

And because He got up, we can get up!

We can get up from our ashes, and we can behold God’s beauty!

We can get up from our mourning, and we can start dancing with the oil joy.

And church, we can get up because we can take off that spirit of heaviness, and put on that garment of praise!

Now, that’s beautiful!

All that God has done through Christ Jesus, is beautiful!

And all that God will do, now, henceforth and forever more is beautiful!

Therefore, today, we can sing, You Are So Beautiful, To Me!