

Beauty for Ashes

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

When we heard about the Cross, we discovered the place where all the sins we will ever commit were transferred to Jesus Christ two thousand years ago. Still, as a result of sin, we have accumulated guilt, shame, and fear in our consciousness. To deal with the anxiety that comes with those conflicts, we develop defense mechanisms. Arrogance, anger, passivity, depression, and even human goodness may be our means of manipulating people and circumstances just to get by in this life.

This booklet will show that God has provided a way to deal with all the baggage we have brought with us. His solution? Get rid of it. He has provided an altar, the Holy Spirit of burning, and a sentence of death.

Since our new life in Christ is supernatural, we can go through death, and what remains is pure. The ashes are taken to a clean place by our great High Priest, Jesus Christ. Now, as often as

it takes, we need to bring everything that does not glorify God to that altar. There He will give us beauty for ashes.

Chapter One

DON'T FEED ON ASHES

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

“Command Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of the burnt offering: It is the burnt offering, because of the burning upon the altar all night unto the morning, and the fire of the altar shall be burning in it.

“And the priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen breeches shall he put upon his flesh, and take up the ashes which the fire hath consumed with the burnt offering on the altar, and he shall put them beside the altar.

“And he shall put off his garments, and put on other garments, and carry forth the ashes without the camp unto a clean place” (Leviticus 6:8-11).

“And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water

of separation: it is a purification for sin” (Numbers 19:9).

Ashes represent loss, humiliation, shame, and failure because of sin. In Job 2:8, Job is sitting in the ash heap. One reason for his going there was that the ashes contained a healing substance called potash, which cured his disease. Yes, they were a symbol of a low position (Job 13:12), and they also related to suffering losses (Job 42:6). Still, the ashes were healing his disease (Job 2:8).

What Are You Eating?

But there is something else that happens with ashes.

Recently I heard a message from a preacher who said, “I want you to remember your sins!”

A man had come to him filled with guilt because of sin. Even though he had repented and was living clean, he said to his pastor, “I just can’t forget my sin.”

And the pastor said, “I don’t want you to forget it! God does, but I don’t want you to forget. If you remember your sin, it will help you not to do it again.”

Friends, that is *not* the way it works. Remembering your sin is like feeding on ashes. It causes guilt, shame, insecurity, and discouragement.

Isaiah 44:20 says, “He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?” *Feeding on ashes.*

So many people feed on their ashes.

A policeman stopped someone just the other day. The man was extremely relaxed when the officer walked over to his window and said, “You were speeding.”

This individual, who happens to be a tremendous, doctrinal Christian, just looked at him and smiled said, “Okay.”

The officer said, “Give me your license and registration.” Then he paused and said, “No, I just want your license.” He went to the patrol car to see if there were any other points on the man’s record, and there were none. So he came back with a warning, “Just be careful for a year.”

The man said, “Okay.”

He said two okays. Now, he wasn’t speeding on purpose, because he wasn’t in a hurry, and he drives very carefully. But you know how it is sometimes, when you are thinking of something, and you have no reason to go over the limit, but you just do it—by a mistake.

Of course we should obey every ordinance of man (1 Peter 2:13), and this individual was

wrong, though it was totally unintentional. But if this person were to get all upset in that situation, even if he had been given a ticket, he would have been feeding on ashes.

Where Did You Get That Counsel?

When you suffer losses, and you go through your Job experience (as you have been taught that you *will* go through at some time), why do you feed on ashes? Why do you become so downcast? “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God” (Psalm 42:5).

Feeding on ashes means that we feed on the result of sin, defeat, and guilt. Why do you let your own soul counsel you to be negative when you suffer loss? Don’t feed on the ashes. That is what the Word of God says! Not only that, but also it says, “A deceived heart has turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his own soul.”

When a man feeds on ashes, he cannot deliver his own soul. Furthermore, he doesn’t recognize that there is a lie in his right hand. That means there is a lie in what he is approving and believing. For the spiritual Christian, the right hand speaks of God’s approval—the Finished Work of God for us. But if we approve of a lie,

we are being deceived because of feeding on the ashes.

It doesn't matter what you mix in with ashes—garlic, spaghetti, tomatoes. Regardless of what you try to mix in with them, they do not taste good! In all the world, I've never seen any nationality say, "We have a wonderful dish made up with ashes." They are *not* good to eat!

The ashes came from a burnt offering. They represent our failure, shame, and guilt, which were paid for by Christ. Think of your ashes as coming from Jesus Christ. He not only paid for your sins, but He also *became* your sin. Jesus Christ who knew no sin, who was absolutely spotless, took our sins to a clean place. There they were separated from us and from Him forever. They are in a clean place, because His blood cleanses them all away. It is so important that we understand this.

The only thing left of the offering is the ashes. So God says, "Take those ashes from the burnt offering, and as you clean off the altar, place them beside it. Then once the altar has been cleaned, take the ashes outside the camp and put them in a clean place" (Leviticus 6).

All of our ashes should be put in a clean place called "the water of separation, a purifica-

tion for sins” (Numbers 19:9). Though this is ceremonial, it represents what has happened to our sins.

That pastor was wrong. You are not to remember your sins. How can you agree with God if you remember your sins? Amos 3:3 says that two cannot walk together, except they be agreed. You cannot walk with God and remember your sins. Don’t feed upon the ashes of your sins.

Chapter Two

THE GREAT EXCHANGE

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD 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;

“...To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified” (Isaiah 61:1-3).

So, here is the great exchange: Beauty for ashes. Where are the ashes? They are in a clean place, separated—according to the principle of purification for sin. And what does God give us? *Beauty for ashes*. But that is not all. Because we don’t feed on ashes, He gives us the oil of joy for mourning.

Imagine it! The Christian who has had an exchange has the oil of joy instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of heaviness, and beauty for ashes. When a believer who has this kind of doctrine in his soul goes home to be with the Lord, we have a victory service—we don't call it a funeral. Thank God.

Is That a Lie in Your Right Hand?

Some people will hear a message like this and fight with their spouse the next day. Then they will rationalize and say, "The pastor said that some of us will choose to feed on the ashes—so that must be you!" Sure! There is a lie in your right hand, too, and you can't deliver your own soul.

Leave the ashes in a clean place, and don't feed upon them! In John 6:53, Jesus said, "Eat my flesh and drink my blood." And they ate the Lamb and drank the blood of the New Covenant.

Feast on the Lamb of God. Partake of the love of God, the joy of God, the peace of God, the purity of God, the power of God. Just eat the Word of the Lord Jesus Christ and stop feeding on the ashes.

Remember, all that man said to the policeman was "okay." What else was there to say?

But he wasn't upset, and he wasn't worried.
The Holy Spirit said, "You were wrong."
He said, "Okay."

Every Word of God Is True

Some feed on the riches of this world instead of the Lamb of God. Thank God that when you feast on the Lord Jesus Christ, your portion is not in this life. There is nothing wrong with having a great portion, in terms of wealth. I hope you have more, and get more, and can help further the work of God with it. But your portion is not in this life, thank God. He wants to give you far more.

Can you imagine how one well-known entertainer was feeling when he was interviewed on television just a few days before he died with cancer? The talk show host said, "Is there anything that worries you about dying?"

He said, "Yes. I keep wondering, what if there *is* a hell?"

This man had hired three people to disprove the reality of hell, because he was so afraid of it—but they couldn't do it! In fact, at least one of the researchers became more convinced that the Bible is absolutely true.

Where Is Your Portion?

Can you imagine having so much in this life and then dying and waking up in hell tormented? Your soul is in hell, your body is in the grave, and the facts of the matter are crystal clear and cannot be changed.

In Luke 16:19-31, the rich man died and lifted up his eyes in the flames of hell. He saw Abraham and Lazarus the beggar, but they were afar off. "And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." Can you imagine knowing that your portion is gone forever and ever and ever?

Then Abraham said, "I can't do that. Between us is a great gulf fixed. We can't come to you, and you can't come to us. Not only that, Lazarus is comforted, and you are tormented because you rejected the greatest gift in the world, Jesus Christ."

The rich man's portion was in this life. In the end, he went to hell. We need to recognize Ecclesiastes 5:19 to 6:2-3 and what these verses say about accumulating wealth and riches. There is nothing wrong with that in itself, but this speaks

of unsaved people who accumulate all these things. Because they are full, they do not desire to have God in their lives. When they die, it is a vexation of spirit and vanity, because they lose everything they had forever.

According to Ecclesiastes 9:9, unsaved people can have fantastic marriages and live joyfully in this life. They may even have better marriages than some Christians have. But then they die and go to hell. Their portion was in this life.

Chapter Three

DESIRE THE RIGHT PORTION

David prayed, “Deliver us from infected people who have their portion in this life” (see Psalm 17:13b -14). This is a warning for us all. We need to purpose to be around people who don’t desire a portion in this life only, who do not mock soul winning, and who do not mock Spirit-filled people.

Psalm 73:24 says God will guide us with His counsel, then He will take us up to heaven. “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever” (Psalm 73:25-26).

The psalmist’s portion was God, for ever and ever, and not anything else.

That is how we get victory over mourning. That is how we can have victory over the fear of death. That is how we receive victory over any-

thing—it is to let God be our portion.

“There’s no one in heaven that I desire but thee. There is no one on earth, none else that I desire but thee. My flesh fails, and I get weak: but You, God, are my strength, and my portion for ever.”

Here is the question: Is Jesus Christ your only portion?

When you die, you will lose everything you have. Even if you are saved, you will lose your own body until the resurrection, though your soul will immediately go to heaven. But no one will take their worldly accumulations or accomplishments with them. The only thing a man will have forever is the doctrine he has accumulated and applied in his soul.

Let Jesus Christ be your portion. Seek the Kingdom of God first and his righteousness, and all these other things will be added unto you. And thank God for when He adds things unto your life. He said He will, and He does (Matthew 6:33).

Your Past Is in a Clean Place

If the ashes are for a purification of sin, and since they are not in a bad place but a clean place, then *everything* about your past life is in a

clean place.

Your past is in a clean place! How can that be? Because, Jesus Christ was the offering for your sin (1 Peter 3:18, 2 Corinthians 5:21). Therefore, if your past is in a clean place, how can a man counsel you about your past? The Word of God will counsel you. And after He guides you with His counsel, He will take you up to heaven (Psalm 73:24).

So, if anybody ever tries to discover your past, remember Leviticus 6:10-11, Numbers 19:9: They took the ashes outside the camp. So now, the Bible says, “Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp” (Hebrews 13:13a).

Who is out there with those clean ashes? Jesus is, and He is outside the camp.

Inside the camp, people want you to talk about your sins. They want to make you do penance: to sit in ashes and eat the shame, to feast on the losses and the suffering of everything that has ever happened in your life. Stop feasting on your ashes because of your circumstances! God isn't dead.

When you are being tested by the trial of your faith to glorify God, there is nothing wrong with saying, “He has given me beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise

for heaviness. During this trial, I will be called ‘a tree of righteousness’, the planting of the Lord, that I may glorify Him.”

A Safe Haven

When the storms come, it is vital that we know where we are. Song of Solomon 4:12 says we are a garden that is enclosed, a spring that is shut up, and a fountain that is sealed.” What a great place to be! The next verse says, “Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits” (Song of Solomon 4:13a).

This is the picture: Every seed in a pomegranate reproduces another pomegranate. Each fruit is filled with many seeds, and if one has a hundred seeds, it will produce a hundred pomegranates. So, the believer who is hid with Christ in God will bring forth much fruit. Therefore, we must not sow the Word of God in thorns. “Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns” (Jeremiah 4:3).

The Word of God says that if we sow in God’s righteousness, we shall reap in mercy. It is time to break up the fallow ground. Just keep doing it until the Lord rains His righteousness upon you (Hosea 10:12).

My life is sealed, my spring is shut up, and

my garden is enclosed (Song of Solomon 4:12); it is the *Lord's* garden, the *Lord's* spring, and the *Lord's* fountain. When He died, He paid for every sin, every wrong thing, so there cannot be any charge to God's elect (Romans 8:33).

We have been given beauty for ashes, joy instead of mourning. Now, there is no condemnation, no separation, and there is only one place for us to grow. We are like "trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD" (Isaiah 61:3). A tree just grows straight up. There is not a single thing between the tree and God but the air and the sky. As trees of righteousness, we stand upright toward God, and we walk tall to glorify God.

CONCLUSION

Make a decision to get through an entire week without feeding on the ashes. Furthermore, don't let your friends feed on the ashes. Recognize that they have been carried to a clean place, and they bear no resemblance to their former identity.

People who curse are feeding on the ashes of demons. They are told not to take God's name in vain, and that if they do, they are guilty (Exodus 20:7). Why? Because Jesus made them, Jesus died for them, Jesus loved them, and He will save them by grace. So, to take His name and curse it is more than vanity. It is evil.

Did you ever wonder why people don't curse in Mohammed's name, or Buddha's name? They don't because the devil hates Jesus Christ. Satan wants to use the Lord's people to curse the name and character of God by taking His name in vain.

Get rid of your ashes on the altar of God. Let

the Holy Spirit fill you, and let His fire refine you. When everything else is removed, you will stand, having God as your portion forever.