



FAR ABOVE RUBIES

Beauty for Ashes

A story is told of a Sunday school teacher who decided to have her young class memorize Psalm 23 and gave them a month to learn it. Although he practised very hard, Joshua struggled to get past the first line. When the day came for him to recite the 23rd Psalm in church, he stepped up to the microphone and proudly declared *“The Lord is my Shepherd and that’s all I need to know.”*

As Christians we need to know and understand the Word of God, particularly when we feel tempted, discouraged or in despair. When Jesus was being tempted by Satan in the wilderness He quoted scripture several times to defeat the enemy “It is written...” (Matt. 4 v 4, 7, & 10). In Hebrews 4 v 12 we can also see the importance of God’s word, *“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword.”* In 2 Peter 1 v 4 we read that through Jesus we have been given *“exceedingly great and precious promises.”* but I wonder just how often we apply them to our lives. There are three wonderful promises God has given to us in Isaiah 61 v 3, which I trust will be a blessing.

Firstly we see that God has promised us **beauty for ashes**. In Bible days, during times of mourning or deep sorrow ashes would be placed upon the head (2 Sam. 13 v 19). We also see that when Job’s health was attacked (Job 2 v 8), he went and sat among the ashes. Perhaps you have been overwhelmed by hurts and difficulties you have experienced and feel as though you have been left in the ash heap. You may even feel content to remain in the ashes feeling sorry for yourself, instead of moving on. God wants to help us as we see from Psalm 113 v 7 which states *“He raises the poor and lifts the needy from the ash heap.”* God has promised that if we will hand over our ashes to Him He will replace them with *“a crown of*

beauty” (NIV) – He will exchange our brokenness for His healing.

In this verse we also see that God has promised **the oil of joy for mourning**. We should note that in those days when people were grieving it was customary **not** to anoint your head with oil. In our lives there will be times when we will suffer grief and pain, and may experience dry spells when we feel unloved and unlovely. It’s then that we must avail ourselves of the “*oil of joy*” or “*the oil of gladness*” (Psalm 45 v 7) that God has provided. Oil in Scripture symbolises the anointing of the Holy Spirit, so that even through the hard times we can experience the joy of the Lord. The Holy Spirit is the One who can truly bring us peace and comfort, and fill us with “*joy unspeakable and full of glory.*” (1 Peter 1 v 8)

In Psalm 43 v 5 we read “*Why are you cast down O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.*” When we are heavy of heart and spirit it can affect our health and rob us of our peace. God, however, has promised us **a garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness**. As you know, a garment is something that you have to make a conscious decision to put on. It is the same with praise. We must choose to praise the Lord even when we don’t feel like it. It’s only then that your heaviness will lift. I am reminded of Paul and Silas who having been beaten with rods and put in stocks in the inner prison, still chose to praise the Lord. Acts 16 v 25-27 tells us that as they were singing hymns and praying their chains (and those of the other prisoners) were loosed, and the doors were opened. Hallelujah! Their prayer and praise not only loosed Paul and Silas but affected those around about them.

In Isaiah 61 v 3 we have read that God will give us, “*beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.*” We need to understand however, that the ashes, the mourning and the heaviness are things that we must hand over to God if we are to live victorious Christian lives. Why on earth would we want to sit in the ashes, mourning with a heavy spirit, when Jesus has purchased so much more for us!