

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF THROUGH...

BEAUTY – Exodus 31:1-11

The book of Exodus records God’s dramatic rescue of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt through a series of powerful, divine acts that revealed His unique sovereignty (*Exodus 6:2-8*). Exodus’ story does more than just narrate God’s acts; it also offers an authorial perspective that helps its readers recognize that God acted dramatically because the humans He made in His image either did not know Him or did not understand Him.

While God’s dramatic actions in Egypt tend to come to our minds first when we think about the ways He revealed Himself in Exodus, the tabernacle offers another, equally prominent (if not more significant) way God revealed Himself. Exodus also reveals an important detail about the tabernacle; God specially commissioned, and divinely inspired, two individuals – Bezalel and Oholiab – to make the the tabernacle a beautiful, artistic building (*Exodus 31:1-11*). We will therefore consider beauty’s role in both the tabernacle and the Bible and what insights it offers us into God’s identity.

“The beauty of the Lord”¹

Ever-present, all-knowing, all-powerful – these tend to be the words we sometimes resort to when describing God. Or maybe we rightfully describe God as love, as the God of justice and mercy. But how often do we describe God as the God of beauty?

Consider, therefore, the following passages and what they reveal about God:

- **Genesis 2:9, 10-14** – God made Eden, His first dwelling place on earth (*cf. Genesis 3:8*), a place of beauty that became a template for the beauty defining His later dwelling places (*cf. Exodus 25:31-40; 1 Kings 6:29-36; Ezekiel 41:17-20, 25-26; Revelation 22:1-5*).
- **Exodus 31:1-11** – God’s interest in beauty extended to the tabernacle and His inspiration of Bezalel and Oholiab to create “artistic designs” for the tent and its furnishings (*cf. Exodus 35:30-39:43*).
- **Exodus 28:2, 40** – God also instructed Bezalel and Oholiab to oversee the creation of special clothing for the priests “for glory and for beauty”.
- **Ezra 7:27** – God’s interest in the beauty of His dwelling place extended even to the post-captivity temple built during the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra records that God motivated Persian king Artaxerxes “to beautify the house of the Lord”.
- **Ecclesiastes 12:10** – Ecclesiastes’ comment that “the preacher sought to find words of delight” reminds us that God’s interest in beauty extends to the poetry that occupies a large portion of His Bible.

¹ Psalm 27:4. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

- **Psalm 27:4; 50:2; 96:6** – the psalmists remind us that beauty connects to God’s person; it describes a real, even though hard to define, quality essential to His identity.

Applications

The above passages describe beauty’s connection to God and the place our experience of beauty has in our relationship with Him. But what can we take from that connection? What lessons can we take from our experience of God’s beauty? Consider the following suggestions:

- God made the world and filled it with beauty, and He created us with the capacity to see it and enjoy it. Beauty therefore reminds us that God is not merely utilitarian in His relationship with us; He intentionally includes inspirational beauty that solicits our meditation.
- God’s use of beauty reveals that He wants more than our minds; He also wants our hearts and our imagination (*cf. Deuteronomy 6:4-5*).
- God created us to recognize and enjoy beauty; it is part of the full human experience He purposefully created. We must be careful to therefore draw on that full experience, balancing it in the ways God intended and using it for their God-designed purposes.
- God employed “artistic designs” in the creation of His tabernacle and temples (*cf. Exodus 34:1-11*). His use of such things reminds us of the role beauty can have in furthering His will.
- Much of the art/beauty production in our world runs counter to God’s will. Even though much of our world’s art has been coopted to serve the interests of the individual artist rather than the interests of God, we should not allow that change to deprive us of the insights and resources God intended art/beauty to offer us.

For the coming week:

To help extend the lesson and to encourage you to make it personal, take time during the coming week to consider the following material:

Read and reflect

Read Ecclesiastes 12:9-14 and consider the place it gives to wisdom poetry. How do you think the artform of poetic writing can teach knowledge (*Ecclesiastes 12:9-10*)? What do you think the Bible’s widespread use of poetry reveals about the way God expects us to discover, and interact with, truth? How might poetry’s presentation of truth differ from, for example, the way Paul presents it in his epistles and what do you think those differences reveal?

Pray

Spend time praying this week, asking God to help you become more aware of the beauty He creates and more sensitive to the ways in which He wants that beauty to impact you.