

Beauty for Ashes

by Abigail Rayn



Sometimes it is in the rubble that we finally meet Jesus. Addictions, broken relationships, debt, abuse, neglect. Fill in the blank. Maybe from our own bad choices, maybe from the actions of others done to us, or maybe just simply how life unfolded. However, or whatever the circumstances, all we see is irrefutable damage with no hope and no way out.

But beloved, Jesus came to take all our sorrows, pain and filth and replace it with His beauty. He lifts these heavy burdens we've been carrying; the shame, the guilt, the regrets, and turns them into something beautiful. Then, incredibly, over time, He replaces it with joy. Indescribable joy.

I recently began a slow and painful process of going back into old journals I had kept over many years. Detailed ledgers of life events and traumatic situations. I uncovered a trail of buried memories that were now being exhumed. The words on the pages cut into my heart like dormant shrapnel being extracted with a malicious magnet. The journals didn't serve any purpose but to remind me of painful experiences holding my soul hostage with self condemnation. They evoked yearnings for a different past, wishing I could go back and do things differently, but of course I can't.

Then, as I prayed, truth prevailed. Over the those painful lies, The Spirit reminded me that Jesus came to earth as an infant clothed in the flesh of humanity, but without sin. He died an agonizing death on a wooden cross so that I could be set free. He created me before I was even born and he loves me just the way he created me, knowing the very details of my life and every event there in. But He didn't do that for only me, He did that for every one of us.

When we come to understand this amazing grace and love, we also come to realize that we have been made new and strong, reborn for His glory. He clothes us in new garments. Garments of Praise, the Bible calls it. The past is forever gone. We need not, and should not, hold onto the chains from which He has freed us.

So it was, on this particular day He reminded me of this sacred truth. I created a cathartic sacrifice that day by burning those menacing journals in my backyard fire pit. As I studied the curling charred pages so that not a trace of even a single word remained, I noticed the haphazard shape of the kindling I had used in starting the fire. There lay a cross. God gifted me with a tangible reminder that He exchanged His Beauty for my ashes.

To all who mourn in Israel he will give: beauty for ashes; joy instead of mourning; praise instead of heaviness. For God has planted them like strong and graceful oaks for his own glory.

Isaiah 61:1-3 TLB