

How Isaiah Promises God Will Give Us “Beauty for Ashes” in Painful Seasons

Ashley Hooker | Contributing Writer

2021 15 May



Photo credit: Unsplash/whoislimos

I have attended many funerals in my life, but nothing like the one for my grandmother. She was the rock of our family and helped raise me alongside my mom. On the day of her funeral, I was overwhelmed by the display of grief by my mother. She cried uncontrollably, begged the funeral director not to close the casket, and even screamed a few times.

To this day, that funeral and the mourning that took place afterward have stuck with me for one reason. I was asked almost a week after the funeral why I had not cried over the death of my grandmother. Why was I not mourning?

The answer to those questions lies in the words of Isaiah. Particularly [Isaiah 61:3](#).

“And provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.”

Let us take this time to look deeper at the context of this verse and what it means for us today.

What Is the Context of [Isaiah 61:3](#)?

Isaiah was a prophet who delivered poignant messages to the Jewish people. In his writings, he starts with the topic of judgement. Isaiah tells the people that God will pour out judgement and justice to His chosen people.

Historically, the Israelite people have been involved in many battles. They had been captives of enemy groups such as the Assyrians and Babylonians. Kings such as Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, and Hezekiah were vital to the delayed capture of Judah by the more merciful Babylonians.

The light of this book is when Isaiah reminds the Jews that even though God will judge the people, he will also pour out His love and favor for them. This theme of judgement, repentance, and forgiveness has been happening since the Israelites entered the wilderness.

When we look at our verse in question, we need to take a moment and discuss what verses one and two mean. In verse one, Isaiah says “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me.” This is a reference to the Christ that was to come. Jesus uses these verses to refer to himself while on earth.

Further on in verses one and two, we learn that the one who has the spirit upon him will also mend the brokenhearted, preach good news, comfort, and proclaim freedom to the captives. This is exactly what Jesus was sent to this earth to do. God knew we needed a redeemer before He ever sent His son to die for us.



Photo credit: ©Getty Images/Gordon Images

What Does This Verse Mean?

[Isaiah 61:3](#) is a beautiful picture of what Christ can do for the mourning people of Israel and the ones hurting today. When we examine the verse, we learn that Christ is the joy-giver. He gives a joy that extends beyond the surface. Christ releases us from the bondage that sorrow brings.

Our sorrows can leave us feeling defeated. When we fully give ourselves over to God, our view of the trouble and sorrow of life changes. The circumstances may remain the same, but we change the glass we look through.

It is possible to live while the storm rages, but God remains the calm in the storm. He gives us sources of joy to get us through. Everything we go through in this life contributes to the end when we spend eternity in [heaven](#).

The phrases in [Isaiah 61:3](#) make the meaning of this verse even more powerful. When Isaiah writes the words “beauty for ashes,” he uses Hebrew language that cannot be translated into English. The Hebrew word for beauty used here refers to a headdress, turban, or tiara. God is stating that he is going to wipe out the ashes upon your head and replace it with a beautiful headdress.

Isaiah also tells us we will be anointed with oil. This was a common practice in his time and was usually done in times of festivity. God is also going to clothe his people with a garment of praise. The language here is speaking of a garment that would be dyed in bright colors. Lastly, Isaiah speaks of oaks of righteous. Trees represent people, and the mighty oak of righteousness shows us that in Christ we are strong.

Why Will God Comfort Those Who Mourn?

Our God is a God of comfort. He sent his son to die for us so that we may have life more abundantly. Jesus tells us in [John 10:10](#), “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly.”

God sent his son to be a shepherd to the people. He desires that no one experience an earthly life of sorrow, and an eternal life in hell. It is clear that if God would send his only son to die on a cross for the purpose of saving us, then God would comfort those who are mourning. Our mourning cannot become the thief that destroys us.

[Ecclesiastes 3:4](#) says there is a time for mourning and a time for dancing. Our Lord does not intend for us to stay in the mourning phase. We are supposed to be dancing.

Jesus said in his sermon on the mount in [Matthew 5](#) that blessed were those that mourned, for they would be comforted. This was His promise, and we know that our God never breaks a promise.

Countless times in Scripture we are reminded that God will be our comforter. When he comforts us, we can do what He created us for; to glorify and praise Him.



Photo credit:©Getty Images/seb_ra

What Does This Verse Mean for Us When We Experience Suffering or Mourning?

Inevitably, we are going to experience suffering and mourning in our lives. When we lose loved ones, or our jobs, or even our identity in Christ, we can rest assured that God will come alongside us with his love and comfort.

I believe this verse gives us hope, too. It is a beautiful reminder that God can take what we believe to be the worst of circumstances and turn it into something great. We have hope for coming out on the other side of sorrow with shouts of praise for our Lord.

If we can accept our grief, then we can overcome our grief. We can carry our sorrows to the sanctuary at the foot of the cross and leave them there. When we do that, we can walk away with shouts of praise for the one true God. We can put on our new headdress and bright colored garments for all to see what God has done for us and what he can do for them.

A Prayer for Comfort in Adversity

Lord,

Sorrow and mourning are often a part of my life. I know you never promised that my [faith](#) would protect me from trials and suffering, but you promised to be with me always, even in the valleys. Let me walk hand in hand with you as you turn my sorrows into your praise. You alone can bring beauty from ashes. May I always remember that sorrow and mourning will never have the last word because you will replace it with eternal joy.

In Jesus Name,

Amen

Trials will always be a part of our earthly lives, but when we consider what [Isaiah 61:3](#) says, we have much hope. We can throw off our ashes and place a tiara on our heads. Most importantly, we can use our sorrow to point people to Jesus as we display his splendor with our garments of praise.

Related articles

[5 Comforts God Offers Today That Will Truly Satisfy](#)

[6 Simple Ways to Count Joy When Life Is Difficult](#)

[How Are Christians Uniquely Able to Shine Light in Difficult Times?](#)