

Isaiah 61:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

Continuing Christ's mission statement, God promises to provide specific remedies: "To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Three exchanges demonstrate complete transformation. "Beauty for ashes" (peer tachat epher)—the Hebrew peer means a headdress or turban, replacing the ashes of mourning (Job 42:6, Daniel 9:3). "Oil of joy for mourning"—anointing oil symbolized gladness and festivity (Psalm 23:5, 45:7), replacing grief. "Garment of praise for spirit of heaviness"—clothing represents one's outward expression, replacing despair (ruach kehah—dimmed, faint spirit) with praise. The result: "that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified." The Hebrew elei hatsedek (oaks/trees of righteousness) pictures strength, stability, and flourishing (Psalm 1:3, 92:12-14). From a Reformed perspective, this describes the regenerate believer's transformation. Christ exchanges our sin for His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21), our sorrow for His joy (John 15:11, 16:22), our despair for praise. We become living monuments to God's transforming grace, planted by Him, rooted in righteousness, existing for His glory.

Historical Context

The post-exilic community mourned their diminished circumstances—the modest temple, foreign domination, economic hardship. God promised transformation beyond their imagination. Jesus' ministry began fulfilling this—turning water to wine (John 2:1-11, symbolic of transformation), healing the sick, comforting the mourning. The church experiences ongoing fulfillment as the gospel transforms broken lives into fruitful believers. Complete fulfillment awaits the consummated kingdom where all mourning ends forever (Revelation 21:4) and we stand perfected for God's glory (Jude 24-25).

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How have you personally experienced Christ's exchange of beauty for ashes in your life?
2. What does it mean to be 'trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD'?
3. How does your transformation serve the purpose of glorifying God?

Interlinear Text

לְשׁוֹם	לְאַבֵּל	לְתַתֵּן	לְפָאַר
To appoint	unto them that mourn	in Zion	to give
H7760	H57	H6726	H0
			unto them beauty
			H6287
מַעֲטִים	אֲבָל	תְּמִתָּה	לְבָבָם
for ashes	the oil	of joy	for mourning
H8478	H665	H8081	H8478
			the garment
			H4594
לְבָבָם	וְאַבְלָה	כַּפְרָה	לְבָבָם
of praise	for the spirit	of heaviness	that they might be called
H8416	H8478	H7307	H0
			H7121
אִילָה	בָּאָדָם	מַעֲטָה	לְהַתְפִּאָרָה
trees	of righteousness	the planting	of the LORD
H352	H6664	H4302	H3068
			that he might be glorified
			H6286

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 30:11 (Parallel theme): Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness;

John 16:20 (Parallel theme): Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.

Isaiah 61:10 (Righteousness): I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

Psalms 45:7 (Righteousness): Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

Ecclesiastes 9:8 (Parallel theme): Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.

1 Peter 2:9 (Resurrection): But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

Psalms 23:5 (Parallel theme): Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Matthew 5:16 (Parallel theme): Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

1 Corinthians 6:20 (Spirit): For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

Zechariah 3:5 (References Lord): And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by.