

Through the Lens of God's Beauty

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Preacher: Paul Tripp

[0 : 00] Good morning. How are you guys doing? Good, good. Hey, you know, my name is Tobin Miller. I'm a teaching pastor here at Watermark. If you're here joining us for the first time, this is our first time actually in this venue. So we're continually being amazed at how God provides a place for us to come and to plant our tent and to worship Him and to see how amazing and great He is. And this week we've had a very special privilege on our journey as a church.

We're here three years old. We would say the purpose of our church is to help people wherever they're at take their next step in their journey towards Christ. That means that some of us haven't started the journey yet. That means some of us have been on the journey for a long time. But wherever you are, our prayer and our hope is as a team that we would bring people, God's Word, community in that would encourage you to take that next step. This week we've had an amazing opportunity to have Paul Tripp come in and we've been doing marriage and parenting conference meetings at Cyberport along with many other churches in Hong Kong. Now Paul, I think, is only the second person we've ever had from the outside come in and speak at Watermark. We try to guard the pulpit pretty closely because we want you guys to hear God's Word very clearly. And I can think of no other person who can communicate God's Word clearly than Paul can. Paul has been a professor at seminary. He's been a pastor for 25 years. He's a church planner. He's part ahead of Paul Tripp's ministries. He's a speaker, an author.

He's very hard to get as a conference speaker in the States and sometimes it's two years and we were amazed that it took us less than two years and we were very fortunate to bring him in here and just speak into our lives what it means to walk with the Lord. And one of the things I appreciate about Paul is just his understanding of the gospel and how the gospel impacts and weaves into every moment of our life. And you can hear that so clearly in his books and in his teaching. Paul was joined by Luella, his wife. She came and joined them here. They have four grown children and they just got their first grandchild last Saturday. So that's a huge blessing for them. So with all of that, would you help me welcome Paul Tripp to come up and share with us?

Well, it's been great to be with you and wonderful to be in Hong Kong. God has been bringing us to Asia a lot. We were just in Singapore in October. Well, we got the call that no parent wants to get.

I was about six hours away from home. Luella called me on the phone. My dear wife, Luella is back there. Raise your hand, please. She's trying to hide, but I won't let her. And Luella is a very level person emotionally. I'm the passionate person. I'm up and down in our relationship. Luella is very level emotionally. And when I got the call from Luella, I knew that something serious had happened. I could sense that from her voice. She informed me that our daughter had been in a terrible accident. Nicole was walking down the street in Philadelphia and a drunk and unlicensed driver driving a huge all-terrain vehicle careened off onto the sidewalk and crushed Nicole against a wall.

[3 : 29] She had massive injuries. She had 11 breaks of her pelvis alone. The doctors told us if it had happened in the suburbs of Philadelphia where we live, she wouldn't have made it to the hospital.

I'll never forget how long that trip seemed to take to get from where I was to that hospital intensive care room. I'll never forget walking into the room seeing the broken body of my daughter hooked up to machines. I didn't know for sure what her condition was, but I couldn't think of anything else to do as the heart of this father was breaking but to crawl up onto the bed next to her and put my cheek next to her cheek and whisper into her ear, Nicole, it's dad. I'm here. You're not alone.

Nicole. That kicked in about four years of travail. It was very, very hard. Nicole had remarkable pain.

There was no position she could be in that wasn't painful for her because that center part of her skeleton was shattered. We had no idea where things were going. She was hurt and angry and confused and I didn't go into my office for three months. We couldn't leave her alone. We turned the bottom floor of the back part of our house into a hospital. Now when you go through those kinds of things, hear what I'm about to say. You preach some kind of gospel to yourself. When you're going through difficulty. When the unplanned and the unexpected and the unwanted enters your door, you preach something to yourself. You say incredibly important things about God. You say incredibly important things to yourself about meaning and purpose. Everyone in this room is a philosopher. Everyone in this room is a theologian. Everyone in this room is an archaeologist and you will dig through the mound of your existence to make sense out of your life. I say this all the time and often when I say it, people laugh, but I'm really quite serious, no one's more influential in your life than you are because no one talks to you more than you do. Most of us have learned not to move our lips because they may think we're crazy. But you are in a constant conversation with yourself and the things you say to you are profoundly important because they're formative of the way you respond to life.

In moments of difficulty, what do you say to you? Luella tells me that I don't finish this story of Nicole and I leave congregations in utter trauma.

[6 : 52] So I want to tell you by God's grace, Nicole is doing very well and if you saw her, you probably wouldn't know she had been in the kind of accident she was in. Now in your bulletins, it says that I'm speaking from Mark 6 and you have a passage from Mark 6 there and I'm not. That's just because I'm rebellious. You'll just have to pray for me. God's not done with me yet. Sometimes I step over the boundaries. So if you're mad about that, it's my fault. You can talk to me later. It's not anyone else's fault here at Watermark. I want to read for you from Psalm 27. Now Psalm 27 is a psalm of trouble.

I love the psalms. I love, love, love the psalms because I think the psalms are very honest about the messiness of faith between the already of your conversion and the not yet of your homegoing as you're living in this broken, fallen world. I love the psalms. I think the psalms are in the Bible to keep us honest because faith doesn't look so easy and doesn't look so platitudinous in the psalms. It looks messy and hard. You have psalms where the cry is, how long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?

And Psalm 27 is a psalm that the scholars say is written out of one of two moments in David's life. Either it's written when David was fleeing from his own son Absalom because Absalom, his son, had decided to take his throne. Now think about this. If it's a monarchy, the only way you can fully take another person's throne is for that person to die. Think about this. This is a father whose son is not just after his position, who is after his life. Think how heartbroken you would be. And you know when you begin to read this story that it's not going to have a happy end. And it doesn't. There's a moment when that rebellious, murderous son dies and David is a father he can't celebrate. He crumbles to the ground and cries, Absalom, my son, Absalom, Absalom. It's as poignant of a moment as you have in all of Scripture.

Or this psalm may have been written when David was fleeing from Saul, a king that he served loyally who hates him and is out to take his life. This psalm is written out of trouble, the kind of trouble you would read in the newspaper and it would take your breath away. Let me read for you.

The Lord is my light and salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is a stronghold of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. Though an army acamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war rise against me, yet I will be confident. One thing I have asked of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble. He will conceal me under the cover of his tent, and he will lift me up on a high rock. It's very interesting that this psalm of trouble doesn't begin with trouble. This psalm of trouble begins with theology, and there is immediately a lesson in that for us here what I'm about to say. Peace in times of trouble begins with sound biblical theology. It doesn't begin with trying to figure out what in the world God is doing.

[11 : 11] God's secret will is called his secret will because it's secret. You'll never ever reach peace by trying to understand things that God has not yet revealed to you. Peace is found in grabbing a hold of things that God has already revealed to you in his word. That's where peace is found.

And what David says in this moment of trouble in his life is remarkable. The Lord is light. The Lord is salvation. The Lord is stronghold. Think about that. What does light point to in Scripture? Light is a metaphor for what is true and what is right and what is holy and what is just.

In a world where evil things happen. In a world where there's injustice on every side. In a world where people make evil decisions that alter the lives of others. It's so wonderful to know that ruling over all of that chaos is a God of perfect holiness, perfect justice. Hear what I'm about to say.

Holiness and justice will win. Sometimes that's hard to see. The legal authorities in Philadelphia wanting to get Nicole's case through the court, I would imagine, pled it down from a drunk driving case to a reckless driving case and she got no justice whatsoever.

Hard to accept. Hard to accept. But there is justice in this world because this world is ruled by a God of remarkable, untainted justice. The Lord is salvation. In the biggest, grandest term, sense of that term, what does that word mean?

[13 : 23] It means deliverance from evil. The evil inside and the evil outside. This is a God who is zealous and intent on delivering us from evil.

And although evil is still around us and evil is inside of us, this God will not rest. He will not relent. He will not stop until evil is no more.

Right now, your Lord is in the process of eradicating evil, although it doesn't seem like that. There will be a day when all of us are invited to the one funeral that we'll all want to attend.

We will be invited to the funeral of sin and death because sin and death will die. And we will live on forever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever in a place where these things are no more.

The Lord is refuge. What's the picture there? The picture is of a fortified city, thick-walled and safe, a place to run in times of trouble.

[14 : 47] If you're God's child, you are never alone in trouble. It's impossible for you to be left alone in trouble. It's impossible for you to be left alone to your own resources and your own ingenuity and your own wisdom because a God who is refuge has invaded your life by His grace.

There's refuge. You're not without a place to run. The Lord is light.

The Lord is salvation. The Lord is refuge. Now, I'm about to confuse you. I'm warning you. But I must say something that will initially be confusing to you, but I think it's important to say.

What I've just given you is bad theology. It's bad theology. It may have sounded to you like good theology, but it's bad theology. Here's why. Because I've left out a very significant word in this passage.

It's a word that changes everything you think about what David said. David did not write, the Lord is light. He didn't write, the Lord is salvation.

[16 : 04] He didn't write, the Lord is refuge. What did he write? A little two-letter word that changes everything. The Lord is my light.

The Lord is my salvation. The Lord is my stronghold. Listen, here's what David is saying. By glorious grace, grace that I could have never earned or achieved or deserved, this God who is light, this God who is salvation, this God who is refuge, has been connected to me by grace.

He's light for me. He's light. He's salvation for me. He's refuge for me. I will say this, enough of distant, abstract, informational, impersonal theology.

That's not the theology of Scripture. The theology of Scripture is deeply relational and deeply personal. The theology of Scripture is not meant just to define who God is.

It's meant to give you a whole new sense of identity as his children. And if the theology that you believe hasn't redefined your identity as a child of God, that's bad, unhelpful theology.

[17 : 29] Because David is saying, listen, in this moment of trouble, this is who I am. I'm a child of the one who is light. I'm a child of the one who is salvation.

I'm a child of the one who is refuge. You see, when you're going through trouble, you know one of the things you will do? You will assign yourself some kind of identity.

You will tell yourself who you are. You will tell yourself that you're poor and weak and unable and you don't have the resources to get through. You will tell yourself that you've been singled out for a particular suffering.

You will tell yourself that you've been forgotten by God. Or you will tell yourself that you're rich and well-supplied and not alone. And you have every reason to have confidence, not because life is easy, not because it's going well, not because you know what's going to happen next, but because God is and he's connected himself to you by grace.

Grace. Grace. That's what should get you up in the morning and give you a reason to continue. Now, if that isn't radical enough, this psalm is about to get more radical.

[18 : 52] Let me read the next few verses for you. When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.

Though an army acamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war rise against me, yet I will be confident. One thing I have asked of the Lord, that I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and inquire in his temple.

What is radical about this psalm is the contrast between verses 2 and 3 and verse 4. Verses 2 and 3 say, when evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, though an army camp against me, though war rise against me, now think with me, be honest in this moment.

If you're in a situation where there are an army of people who are encamped against you and they want to eat up your flesh, that is a very graphic word picture.

They want to eat you alive. They want you dead. What would be the one thing that you would desire?

[20 : 21] If you were facing unthinkable trouble, you didn't know where it was going to go, but it looks like it's leading to your death, be honest.

What would be the one thing that you would pray for God, to God for? How about weapons? That makes sense to me. Just give me bigger weapons than my enemy.

How about just incinerate them? You're God. You can destroy this enemy with a twitch of your finger.

You're the Lord Almighty. How about sucking me out of the situation and dropping me somewhere else? It's an easy thing for you to do. You're Lord Creator.

But that's not what David prays for. What he says is, this one thing I want to do, I want to run to God's temple and I want to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.

[21 : 31] What? Now either this man is so super spiritual that none of us can relate to him or he's on to something.

Why would that be the response of David? Why would he say, in this moment of deep and dark trouble that I don't think I'm going to get myself out of that is so crushing because two people that I love are out to end my life, this is what I want to do.

I want to run to the house of the Lord. I want to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. Why? Here's why. Here's what I'm about to say. I'm going to explain it.

Because David has come to understand that there exists in the universe one of greater and more glorious beauty than any ugly thing you will ever face in your life.

Let me say it again. David has come to understand that there exists in the universe one of grand and glorious beauty, more stunningly beautiful than any dark, ugly thing that you will ever face in your life.

[22 : 48] If you're facing the loss of a job, you better remind yourself in that ugly moment of the gorgeous beauty of the Savior to whom you have been connected by grace.

If you're facing physical sickness and you feel weaker than you've ever felt in your life, you better remind yourself of the gorgeous beauty of the one who is connected to you by grace.

If you're facing the disloyalty of a friend and you wake up every morning and you remember it again and you know you should get over it, but you don't, your heart is broken, you better remind yourself of the glorious beauty of the one who you've been connected to by grace.

If you're facing things in your marriage that you thought you would never face and you try and you try to bring it to a different place and it doesn't ever seem to be in a different place, you better remind yourself of the stunning beauty of the one to whom you've been connected by grace.

You're at the end of a particularly discouraging parenting day where it seems like your children have conspired together to be particularly rebellious. You better remind yourself of the stunning beauty of the one to whom you've been connected by grace.

[24 : 26] If you're facing the difficulties of old age and your body seems more weak and vulnerable than it ever has before, you better remind yourself of the stunning beauty of the one who you've been connected to by grace.

God is gorgeous in his wisdom. He's beautiful in his sovereignty. He's beautiful in his love. He's beautiful in his faithfulness. He's beautiful in his grace.

He's beautiful in his patience. He's beautiful in his kindness. He's beautiful in his mercy. He's beautiful. He's beautiful. He's beautiful.

He's beautiful. He's beautiful. And here what I'm about to say, you only will ever understand and see clearly the ugliness of life in a fallen world when you look at it through the lens of the beauty of your Savior.

You will only ever understand and see clearly the ugliness that you will face in your life when you see that ugliness through the lens of the stunning beauty of your Savior.

[25 : 44] You see, because when you look at life from the vantage point of the expansive beauty of God's glory, life looks different.

There's a moment in the life of this psalmist. He's a shepherd, young man. His brothers are in the army and they're assembled with the army of Israel in the valley of Elah.

And across from them in the valley is the army of the Philistine nation, a marauding pirate nation. Now the Lord has said, this promised land belongs to you and I will deliver those nations into your hands because I am the Lord.

And so the army of Israel is lined up for battle the very first day and rather than the whole Philistine army coming out, out comes one giant warrior, Goliath.

And he lays out this challenge, send me your best soldier. Guess what happens? The army of Israel goes back to their tents in fear and they commiserate.

[27 : 06] What are we going to do? What are we going to do? What are we going to do? Now what they're doing is they're drawing this false spiritual equation. They're comparing their little selves against this great big giant.

Well, who do you think is going to win? Because they're not looking at this ugly moment from the vantage point of the stunning beauty of the God who has sent them into that valley. They do that for 40 days.

They've completely forgotten who they are. They've completely forgotten who God is. David shows up. It's sort of a humorous family scene. He's there to deliver lunch to his brothers, bread and cheese.

They sort of make fun of him and tell him he's trying to hang around with the real men. Go home and take care of your little lambs. David asks the question of the moment. Why aren't we fighting?

It's a good question. It's the right question. It's a theological question. And then he says, I'll go. Now he either is saying that because he's arrogant or delusional or he's on to something.

[28 : 18] They want to arm him for battle and he doesn't want armament. And as he walks into that valley, now just with the cloak of a shepherd and a wimpy little shepherd's sling and five stones, he says this, he, God, delivered the lion and he delivered the bear and he will deliver this Philistine this day.

David is able to look at that ugly moment, not through the lens of his own ability, but through the lens of the stunning beauty of the God that he represents. And he says, it's not little me against that big giant.

It's this puny little giant against Almighty God. Now who do you think is going to win? And when he walks into that valley, I hear the timpani begin to roll.

The drums get louder as he gets closer to that giant and Goliath mocks him and he says, are you a dog that you're going to give me a stick? That's not a compliment.

And David stands in front of him and now the drums are rolling louder and he begins to, he loads the sling and he begins to do this. Now you're hearing the drums roll and the cymbals crash and you just know there's going to be some kind of carnage.

[29 : 39] And he lets loose of that stone. It seems ridiculous against this giant. But it hits him in the temple, knocks him out and David runs up, pulls the sword out of that man's sling and cuts off his head.

There's an awesome painting in the Metropolitan Museum of New York City. If you're ever in New York City, it's worth going to the Met to see this. It's of this shepherd boy holding this severed head by the hair.

Glory of God. You see, the ugliness of a fallen world is not ultimate in your life.

God is. The ugliness of a fallen world doesn't determine your identity. God does. The ugliness of a fallen world doesn't determine your destiny.

God does. The ugliness of a fallen world doesn't determine your resources. God does. And you only will ever understand the ugliness that you face every day, the ugliness that will enter the door of everyone in this room in some way when you see it through the lens of the stunning beauty of the Lord.

[31 : 09] David has it right. That peace in times of trouble begins with sound theology.

But here I'm about to say, but it's rooted in the worship of God. the thing that will destroy fear in your life is the worship of God.

Because the more that worship helps you to see his stunning grandeur and beauty, the smaller those troubles become in your life.

Now I want to give you homework. I'm serious. If you've got a pen and piece of paper, write this down. There will be a quiz. I'm going to give you four things to do.

Because I want what we've talked about this morning to be practical to you, to be life-changing for you. I'm going to give you four words. Four words that you need to nail into your life.

[32 : 14] Here's the first word. Gaze. Gaze. Make a commitment every morning, first thing in the morning, to take a few moments to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.

I'm serious. Go to Isaiah 40, which is a riff on God's grandeur. Go to the last few chapters of the Proverbs where God just displays his splendor in front of Job.

Go to the first couple chapters of Ephesians where God reveals his sovereign grace. Go somewhere and just focus on the beauty of the Lord. Start every day by gazing on the beauty of the Lord.

Second word is remember. Remind yourself that that beauty defines your identity.

That God is not just these things. He's these things for you. Because I think there are many of us, I think you can understand this term, who are identity amnesiacs.

[33 : 29] We're identity amnesiacs. We very quickly forget who we are. The troubles of life cause us to forget who we are. Gaze, remember, third, rest.

Let your heart rest. Not because you know what's happening in your life. Not because you figured it out. Not because you understand.

Not because circumstances are easy, but because God is, and he is what he is for you. Your rest in who he is and your identity as his child.

Fourth word, now act. Let your responses to life be based on gazing and remembering and resting because the Psalms say, do not fear, it only leads to evil.

The decisions you make out of anxiety and worry or fear are often the ones you live to regret. Gaze, remember, rest, and act.

[34 : 53] one thing I desire that I may dwell in the house of the Lord and gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.

You will only ever understand properly and see clearly the ugliness of life in a fallen world when you view it through the lens of the stunning beauty of your Savior.

Let's pray. Lord, how thankful we are for this vignette in the life of David.

How thankful we are that we are able to eavesdrop on this moment and for the way it confronts us and encourages us.

May we be people who gaze and rest and remember and then act with hope and courage, joy, and commitment because we've seen life through the lens of your stunning beauty.

[36 : 15] In Jesus' name, amen. one of the things that always kind of challenged me, I think God challenges me and the church is how does the worship that happens, the music, the singing, the sermon, the receiving of his scripture, how does that connect with the worship that happens throughout the week 24-7 in our lives?

God reveals himself to us, you know, week after week through the scripture, through the message, through the music. How is he revealing himself to me in my neighborhood, in my workplace, in my home and how am I responding to what he's doing and what he's speaking to me throughout the week?

And one thing that's so clear in scripture is that God tells us the religion that is pure and faultless is this, to look after widows and orphans in their distress.

And in those days, in the days of scripture, widows and orphans represented the most marginalized, the most broken, the most poor people in society.

And the question, I guess, is posed to me is what are we doing as a church, as an individual, as a community group to embrace that, to embrace that true religion and overflow what God has so richly lavished upon us.

[37 : 47] And one community group within Watermark, one community group, I believe, really caught that vision and God really began using them to reach out to the poor in the Western District, the elderly, the homeless.

And from that, we've really seen, I would say, God has begun a grassroots movement. You know, different groups have gotten involved, different individuals, and they've partnered with a Christian NGO called St. Barnabas Society.

And they're based in the Western District of Hong Kong in the West Island area. And they reach out to these people. And they're on the brink of starting something new, that God's starting something new in this society.

And they want to reach out to children from low-income families all around the area, many public schools and those things. And Sam has been just one of many people who have really gotten their hands dirty and getting involved with this organization.

So I just want to ask Sam if you could share with us a couple things about what God has been showing and revealing and revealing about himself through this new project with the children.

[38 : 59] Yeah, God's touched our hearts and opened our eyes. And it's amazing what God's doing for our small community group. And in the shadows of IFC, you know, where most of the investment bankers work in Hong Kong, is St. Barnabas, one of the, you know, an area, it's a shelter and on the ground floor we know that they serve a lot of meals and they do so much for the needy.

And it was around Chinese New Year when our community group served at St. Barnabas and I remember I was there with my wife and our group and, you know, we were serving some soup and I clearly remember a lady walked in and she came late and they're meant to register their name and she walked straight in and she grabbed two loaves of bread and in my name, a bit naive, I looked at her and her eyes and that type of look and said, you're not meant to really take that.

And she looked back at me, you know, with a broken heart and she said, it's for my children. And my heart broke then and there and I saw the need that as I looked around for that Chinese New Year meal, it was only the adults and God opened my eyes and opened my heart and the need is there's 15,000 families living on a monthly income of less than 10,000 Hong Kong dollars.

when you look at it, that doesn't go far for when you've got children and these children require an education. You think, how much do you spend on your child's education?

Yeah, it really opened our eyes and the need is there to do something. Yeah. God's really reached out to them through St. Barnabas Society and I guess the next question that comes from that is how can you and I and the community and our church respond to what God's doing through St. Barnabas?

[41 : 17] Yeah, there was an individual in our Watermark community that came to our care group or came and said, do you think you can help raise some funds? What we'd like to do is on the second story of St. Barnabas is build and renovate a place, a safe place for children to learn, a place where they can have a meal and just generally a place where families can unite and I reached from my back pocket and he sort of said, no, no, it's going to cost a bit more than that and so we thought, well, how do we go about having a response and he got together with a couple of others in the Watermark community and we went to the investment banks and we said, there's a need, will you help us?

And the response was yes and so there's one investment bank that's donating over a million Hong Kong dollars.

There's another investment bank that has said, every dollar that Watermark community raises, we'll match them, we'll match them dollar for dollar and it's just amazing and if we add up how much has already been raised, we're almost there.

We're almost there to make a real difference to these low-income families and households and it's amazing how God touches our hearts and opens our eyes and we're in a position to almost have this community for these low-income families.

amazing. And so all of this is in a way leading up through the next Sunday, the next two Sundays, we'll be hearing a little more about the things that God is doing in the community in our church from a grassroots level leading up to the Sunday of December 8th and that whole week leaders have made a decision that that Sunday and that week all the tithes and offerings that we receive will be dedicated completely to community service and church planting and it's just an amazing opportunity for us to maximize the connections and just the resources and blessings that God has poured out on us.

[43 : 39] So let me just pray for St. Barnabas and this entire initiative. Just pray with me. Father, thank you so much that you are not simply a God that is with us here for a couple hours on a Sunday but that you are at work in people's lives, in people's homes, all across the neighborhoods of Hong Kong.

So Lord, I pray for the city. I pray about the poverty, the brokenness. Lord, we know that underlining every physical and material and emotional need is a spiritual brokenness.

So Lord, I pray that that as we go forth, as we pour out everything that you've given to us, Lord, you would show us how to reach, reach these people.

I want to pray for St. Barnabas Society for the great work that they do, Lord. I pray that you would keep them fixed on you, Lord. That they would gaze at you. They would remember, Lord, and they would act boldly, Lord, out of your grace and your power.

And Lord, that we can simply be humble servants that come alongside them to encourage them, to challenge them and be a light in this world, Lord. That all people who see our good works will glorify the God who created us to do good works.

[44 : 54] We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.