

<a href="#">C 3Epiphany</a> , B 3Lent B Epiphany Last/Transfig — ABC Christmas Day	<b>Beauty - The 3<sup>rd</sup> Transcendental</b>  Ps 19.1, Ps 50.2, Is 33.17, Is 52.7  by <a href="#">Tim Isbell</a>	Preached 9/2/2018 at Santa Clara Nazarene Church
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Thesis: It's time to grow beyond thinking of Christian faith as true and good and begin to think about and share it as beautiful (elegant, ingenious).

### ***Prayer time teachable moment***

Isaiah 33.17 *Your eyes will see the king in all his splendor, and you will see a land that stretches into the distance.*

Connect Isaiah to a fresh flower bouquet and [Practicing God's Presence](#) "Physical 06."

### **"Just taking notes."**

Charles invited me to preach. I thought about it, settled the date with Robin, and confirmed with Charles. And started asking God for a message to bring to you.

Two mornings later God awakened me by prompting me with "this is a good time to preach the Three Transcendentals". So I affirmed that prompt and headed back to sleep. But then a string of ideas for the sermon began to flow. So, in the predawn darkness, I reached into the drawer beside my bed and got out a 4x6 card and started writing. My wife is used to me jotting down a word or two, but when I jiggled the bed writing several lines she mumbled, "Writing your sermon?" I replied, "Just taking notes." Some sermons start this way, but not all.

### **Source of today's message**

#### ***Biblical***

The verse from prayer time: Isaiah 33:17 *Your eyes will see the king in all his splendor, and you will see a land that stretches into the distance.*

#### ***Theological source***

Dean Flemming → 2008 book: *Evangelism After Christendom* by Bryan Stone → [Alternate Life Collection](#).

Last year, I heard Bryan speak in Concord, and he introduced a new term to me: the Three Transcendentals. I've thought about it a lot since then.

“Transcendental” means something that *transcends*, or is beyond, the physical and empirical. It’s similar to “metaphysical.”

Classic historical Christian thought identifies three transcendentals: the GOOD, the TRUE, and the BEAUTIFUL. Stone observed that Western Christians focus on the goodness of God and the truth of his story. And when sharing our faith, we mostly try to persuade people that the Gospel is GOOD and TRUE. We generally ignore the third transcendental: BEAUTY.

But today, many people are not very open to talking about the truth at the core of Christian faith - they respond, “That may be your truth, but I have my own truth.” Neither are they attracted to discussions about God’s goodness - they respond, “If God is so good, why is there so much brokenness in the world?”

Increasingly, I’m finding it better to communicate the beauty of the gospel of Christ in which we can participate. Our most natural response to beauty is to stop and stare. True beauty grasps us rather than our grasping it.

*Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who brings good news, the good news of peace and salvation, the news that the God of Israel reigns!*

When truth and goodness connect with beauty, faith comes alive. The way of Christ is simultaneously the greatest truth, the noblest good, and the most exquisite beauty.

### **So, what’s so beautiful/elegant about God?**

I’m an engineer by temperament and training, so I notice beauty in the elegance of design. For example:

#### ***Dynamic range:***

(Describe my early automotive cruise control project.) Now think of the massive dynamic ranges across which God’s creation functions, from the cosmos full of stars and planets to nanotechnology.

#### ***Designs that heal themselves***

Nothing I ever designed healed itself. When the sprinkler system sprung a leak I had to dig up the pipe and fix it. The best I could hope for is that whatever broke would stay broke without triggering a domino effect that broke other parts of the system.

I started using a blade razor again a few months ago. I cut myself several times a week. Every time, so far, at least, my face healed itself! Sure there are some things we need a doctor’s help to fix, and eventually, our body will finally fail completely. But along the way, there are countless times we get injured or sick and our body heals itself! I am deeply impressed with how God built our bodies to heal themselves of so many things.

#### ***Beauty in nature***

Sometimes I stare at a beautiful sunset disappearing into the ocean or over the mountains above our townhouse and gasp to myself (or to Robin, my wife), “Wow! How does God do that?” I have participated in many electronic designs, some of which are built on an elegant concept.

But none even remotely compare with the size and beauty of God's physical creation."

Or consider the night sky. (Telescope story, Jupiter's 3 moons, Saturn's rings, Orion, the north star.)

Psalm 19.1 The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship.

### ***Hidden design nuggets that we get to discover***

In the early 1950s two scientists, Rosalind Franklin and Maurice Wilkins studied DNA using x-rays. Franklin produced an x-ray photograph that allowed two other researchers, James Watson and Francis Crick to work out the 3D structure of DNA. The structure of DNA was found to be a double helix.

"Humanity has a data storage problem: More data was created in the past 2 years than in all of preceding history. That torrent of information may soon outstrip the capacity of electronic memory. Now, researchers report a new way to encode digital data in DNA to create the highest-density large-scale data storage scheme ever invented. Capable of storing 215 petabytes (215 million gigabytes) in a single gram of DNA, the system could, in principle, store every bit of datum ever recorded by humans in a container about the size and weight of a couple of pickup trucks. But whether the technology takes off may depend on its cost.

DNA has many advantages for storing digital data. It's ultracompact, and it can last hundreds of thousands of years if kept in a cool, dry place. And as long as human societies are reading and writing DNA, they will be able to decode it."<sup>1</sup>

I think God is sitting on his throne in heaven looking down, smiling, and saying to Jesus and the Spirit, "I wondered how long it would take humans to figure out how to synthesize DNA strings for use in memories."

### ***Designs that scale***

Consider God's design of food chain design. Astoundingly elegant, scaling from Adam & Eve through to our current 8 billion world population! You may say, "Yes, but what about all the hungry/starving people?" The problem is not a food shortage. There's plenty of food production capacity. The problem is distribution and, as I see it anyway, that's what God's leaving for us to work on. It's part of managing the creation that he assigned to us in Genesis.

### ***My favorite God-design – more than beautiful and elegant, it's ingenious - and wow does this one scale***

It's his design to create a world of people whose hearts beat increasingly like Jesus' heart, where everyone lives in a personal and romantic relationship with God forever. It's a world where God will set us free to follow our hearts as we join him in extending creation.

This design started when God invited one couple to follow him, and today is scaled to include people from all nations, both men and women, and all walks of life, in virtually every corner of the world.

We don't become citizens by being perfect followers of God. We become citizens when we

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<sup>1</sup> From [DNA strings could store all the world's datum in one room](#)

acknowledge our betrayal of him and accept his restoration plan in Jesus! It is an extraordinarily clever and beautiful plan to build what we call heaven. In Christ we are not overpowered by God as a sublime truth; we are romanced by God as pure beauty.<sup>2</sup>

While obedience is better than sacrifice, I find that romance is better than obedience.<sup>3</sup>

Psalm 50:2 *From Mount Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines in glorious radiance.*

### **So here's how to use this message**

1. Start looking for beauty and elegance - and give God credit for it.
2. When the Spirit opens a door to share something about your faith, instead of leading with good or true, lead with beauty.
3. When someone presses you to defend what is the truth about God, or questions how a good God could create such a broken world, respond... but as you respond, also look for a way to balance the conversation by inserting the beauty you see in God.
4. One more thing: buy some cut flowers this week.

### **Next time I preach here**

Because God is sovereign I can live with mystery; because God is good I can enjoy good times when they come; because God is just I can live responsibly regardless of my surroundings. –

[The Preacher's Message](#)

<b>Other resources:</b>
Click on the link for the <a href="#">Google Slides</a> . (Similar to PowerPoint)
<a href="#">Beyond Conversion - Marks</a> . Browse down the Table of Contents to "See God as True, Good, and Beautiful."
Free subscription to email or RSS feeds available at <a href="#">IsbellOnline News</a> .

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<sup>2</sup> Russell Reno quote from *Evangelism After Pluralism* by Bryan Stone

<sup>3</sup> 1 Samuel 15.22-24, Jeremiah 7.21-23

## **Boneyard (stuff I didn't use but don't want to lose)**

Another dynamic range illustration: I've installed a few automatic sprinkling systems for grass and flowers. But God designed the entire water cycle!!! Just think how reliably this system has worked through all history!

Another example of the scope of God's creation: Can God possibly like the mountains in Korea? The rocky deserts around Las Vegas? Similarly: God values every single person he brings to life. Now when I experience barren deserts, I just ask God what he likes about it.