

Promise of a Beautiful Life Propelled by Defiant Joy



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Ensconced beneath a 53K-acre park in south-central Kentucky, the Mammoth Caves boast more than 400 miles of mapped passageways. In touring the caves, my husband and I grabbed chairs and sat tightly as all light sources were extinguished. Though resulting darkness was unlike any we had ever before experienced, it was reminiscent of what Isaiah fingered as “gross darkness” when alluding metaphorically to “wickedness,” “misery,” “sorrow, “destruction,” “ignorance” and “death.”[i] An astute tour guide once characterized Mammoth Caves as a “grand, gloomy and peculiar place,”[ii] which phrase likewise resonates with rise of the Assyrian Empire and fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in the 8th century BC (Isaiah’s time); also, with the Apostle Paul when he characterized first-century pagan Ephesians as “darkness” itself.[iii]

Gross Darkness: A Whole Lotta’ Ugly

Isaiah and Paul faced levels of unprecedented darkness to which you and I sadly relate. To this day, “wicked men” continue to “wax worse & worse.” Fooling themselves and others, those led astray then lead others astray.[iv] By way of example, as “dark” Ephesians worshiped Artemis (Greek goddess of childbirth), neo-pagans today worship at the altar of Artemis by advancing the grand, peculiar and a- biblical notion that men birth babies.[v]

“Grand and gloomy” contemporary examples of gross darkness include brutal persecution of the global church, human slavery and trafficking, addiction and fraud, hunger and homelessness. Add to these warring ideologies that provoke contentious push-back (and counter push-back) that, in effect, shatter relationships. Coupled with Antifa’s stated strategy to divide our nation over Israel, systematic encroachment of godless Marxism and Islamic fundamentalism work in tandem to force America’s demise.[vi]

Contextualized by a global pandemic and trailed by rampant lawlessness, riots and deadly civil disobedience, contentious partisans vociferously dispute disturbing implications of pending, mid-term elections. Notwithstanding Greenland, chaos in Iran, Venezuela, Ukraine and elsewhere foment fear of escalating wars and rumors thereof that threaten onset of World War III and, ultimately, the Battle of Armageddon.[vii]

All examples conjure a whole lotta’ ugly.

“Whole Lotta’ Ugly” Met with Lament

It’s a promise: “In this world, we will have trouble.”[viii] Accordingly, lament meets the whole lotta’ ugly with prayers expressing sorrow, pain or confusion as illustrated in the Psalms, Job and the book of Lamentations. Lament of mature believers is firmly rooted in an unshakable trust relationship with the One who has utterly overcome the very world system being lamented![ix] Notably, believers do not grieve as unbelievers.[x] They are not brow-furled, hand-wringing pessimists, nor do they don sackcloth and ashes. In search of hope and healing through faith, Christians freely bring grief and complaints to God while, concurrently, they abide in peace and courageous good cheer. In the face of pressure, trouble, anguish, hardship, anxiety and distress, believers rightly delight in God’s commands and promises.

“Whole Lotta’ Ugly” Met with Defiant Joy!

The name Habakkuk likely comes from the Hebrew root, “to embrace.” One of twelve minor prophets in the Hebrew Bible, Habakkuk reminds us as believers that even if nature’s bounty disappoints, and amassed assets disappear, we best choose—by intentional decision of will—to embrace worship. In the proverbial face of ugly we, as true worshippers in spirit and in truth, behold His beauty and affirm with defiant joy God’s glorious radiance. In scaling high places of elevated worship, we celebrate ensured rescue, salvation, deliverance, safety and welfare. While rejoicing in the LORD and exalting in the never-failing God of our salvation, we exercise metaphorical feet like those of a deer scaling high places and, doing so, our hearts jump for joy as we spin about in delight![xi]

- **BUT GOD!**

Defyingly joyful worshippers refuse to “balance” scripture with carnal “yeh, buts.” To the contrary, their unshakable “but” is unequivocal confession, “BUT GOD!” Having walked in the midst of darkness, they have seen a Great Light, which Light has dawned on them. Their unshakable conviction is that, even and especially in the presence of ugly, the LORD’s beauty abounds.[xii] Worshippers who hold in their hearts a sense of Divine purpose—i.e., eternity—likewise hold promise that their fathomless LORD makes all things beautiful in His own time.[xiii] Notably, and rightly so, Divine purpose for humankind aligns with God’s timing. He makes everything fit beautifully in its appropriate time, known and orchestrated by God alone. From ashes comes beauty—His time; His way; never failing.

- **Beauty in the Here-and-Now**

Though we live in a land of the shadow of death, ours is an expression of defiant joy. Why? Because of God’s unfailing grace. His beauty referenced in Psalm 27:4 trumps a whole lotta’ ugly, and tearful lament endures but for a fleeting moment. One translation characterizes that moment as a wink!

For believers, weeping endures for the night but, most assuredly, the shout (and song) of joy manifest in the morning.[xiv] Given His timing, God “makes all things beautiful” in the here-and-now by dispelling abject darkness with Light and, then, throughout eternity, by eradicating darkness altogether! A believer’s good life in Christ promises great gain.”[xv] Moreover, in times of trouble, the Lord’s quick-as-a-wink intervention promises joy to last a lifetime! Better yet, at life’s end, believers rightly anticipate ultimate restoration of all things beautiful.

- **Beauty Throughout Eternity!**

No eye has seen, nor ear heard, what ultimate restoration looks like, but believers know assuredly that resplendence to be experienced throughout eternity defies human imagination![xvi] Though experientially mindful of universal hardship and pain, Paul evokes a strong, double-negative verb in Romans 8:1 that negates any comparison whatsoever that presumes to equate temporal suffering with eternal glory. In other words, our glorious, eternal destiny in Christ so far surpasses the brief wink of human suffering that any attempted comparison is folly.

Our Challenge in Such a Time as This

As believers in a darkened world, we have a powerful weapon toward realizing our promise of a beautiful life propelled by defiant joy. The charge is to use it!

Recall that during World War II, nightly blitzkriegs brought London to her knees. With 9 PM chimes of Big Ben, millions of Brits came to a standstill and prayed at least one minute for their beloved country. Winston Churchill endorsed the effort, and BBC broadcasted “Big Ben minute” chimes. Many rightly credited this nationwide moment of prayer for turning the tide of war. In fact, under interrogation, one German intelligence officer confessed: “During the war, you had a secret weapon

for which we could find no counter-measure, and which we did not understand." That very powerful weapon, "the Silent Minute," aligned with chiming of Big Ben.

Similarly brought to our knees at such a time as this, Americans do well to follow Britain's example. If God's people humble themselves, pray, seek His face and retreat from evil, God promises to hear their cries from heaven, forgive their sins, and heal their land.[xvii] God's "yes and amen" promise is not to be taken lightly.[xviii] The KJV of Numbers 23:19 assures us that "God is not a man that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent. Hath He said, and shall He not do it? Or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"

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FOOTNOTES:

[i] Isaiah 60:2

[ii] Mammoth Caves Tour Guide, Stephen Bishop

[iii] Ephesians 5:8

[iv] 2 Timothy 3:13

[v] Transgenders (with biologically female reproductive organs) can get pregnant, as detailed in several reports posted on The National Library of Medicine, operating under the Department of Health and Human Services. However, in the "more sure Word," only biological women give birth. (John 16:21, Genesis 3:16, Isaiah 66:9, Exodus 1:19, etc.)

[vi] In referencing Jews, the Qur'an uses different terms—e.g., Children of Israel, Banu Israil, al-Yahud and the People of the Book (referring to Jews and Christians alike). Beyond the Qur'an, some hadith collections contain narratives regarding Muslims fighting (and killing) Jews. These traditions are cited by critics as evidence of violent prescriptions in the broader Islamic corpus. "From the river

to the sea" is a political slogan that refers to the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. The phrase purports to express different visions for the region. Whereas some view it as a call for Palestinian rights, others interpret it as a call for the elimination of the State of Israel, evidenced historically in massacres that culminated in the Holocaust and, thereafter, in HAMAS' unthinkably brutal attack on Israel (October 7, 2023), resulting in death of noncombatant, Israeli civilians, abduction & persecution of 251 Israeli hostages.

[vii] Found only in Revelation 16: 16, Armageddon comes from the Hebrew root, "to slay." It refers to Megiddo ("hill of assembly"), scene of many ancient battles; also, the future, final war between allied forces of evil and Israel, national and spiritual. So profound will be its devastation that it will take seven months to bury the dead. (Ezekiel 39: 12)

[viii] That being, "many trials & sorrows," "tribulation," "distress," "suffering," "oppression" and "affliction." (Psalm 119:143)

[ix] John 16:33—"I have deprived the world of its power to harm" (Amplified).

[x] 1 Thessalonians 4:13

[xi] Habakkuk 3:17-19

[xii] Psalm 27:4

[xiii] Ecclesiastes 3:11

[xiv] Psalm 30:5

[xv] 1 Timothy 6:6

[xvi] 1 Corinthians 2:9

[xvii] 2 Chronicles 7:14

[xviii] 2 Corinthians 1:20