

The (Only) Perfectly Beautiful Thing

Nathaniel Hawthorne's fascinating story entitled "The Birthmark" focuses on a young scientist named Aylmer who secures the hand of the lovely Georgiana. But all is not well; Aylmer is bothered by a small hand-shaped birthmark lying on his bride's cheek. This supposed defect begins to haunt Aylmer, until it finally consumes his whole mind. He holes up in his laboratory, searching desperately for a cure for Georgiana's "ailment" and neglecting her in the meantime.

Eventually, flushed and exultant, he announces to his wife that he has perfected a potion that will destroy the awful birthmark and grant her perfect beauty. Willing to do anything to please her husband, she obediently swallows the concoction. At first the potion seems to work; the birthmark fades! But as the hand shrinks, Georgiana also fades away. Aylmer finds no joy in Georgiana's flawless beauty, for the disappearance of the birthmark causes her death.

The sobering moral of "The Birthmark" can be summed up in the words of an Egyptian proverb, "A beautiful thing is never perfect." We must be content to find beauty in the midst of our flaws. Try as we might, we humans just can't quite attain perfection, despite several near misses.

Think of an Olympic swimmer, who, after years of training, breaks the world record only to see it smashed the very next year by a brash newcomer. Or consider a couple who have a beautiful relationship as newlyweds. Although their relationship grows even better in the next twenty years, it still isn't perfect. Everything can be improved. A new swimmer comes along, another couple has a more loving marriage. Yes, we seem doomed to live by that proverb, always working but never reaching the goal.

But if there is no hope of perfection, if a beautiful thing is never quite good enough, what

is the point of life? All our striving for glory is meaningless, “labor[ing] for the wind.” (Ecc. 5:16)

Thankfully, this proverb is false. When examining the Lord, there is no either/or. He reigns supreme as the highest standard of perfection and beauty there is or will ever be. And not only is God beautiful and perfect, but all His doings are as well.

First, God’s creation is amazingly beautiful and perfect. Even though the world, in its willfully sinful state, is not how God intended, still nothing man invents can come close in comparison. Our “wonderful” creations will always wear out, or break down, or fall short of our expectations. Our “amazing” achievements can never equal His.

Second, God’s plan of redemption, which provides a way for the world to be restored to its glory, is beautiful and flawless. By dying on the cross, Jesus changed even an evil and bloody thing into something wondrous. He willingly accepted an imperfect human form in order to give humans the chance to become perfect through Him. The Father’s rescue of His helpless people is too beautiful for us to fully comprehend.

God’s character, as revealed through His plan of redemption, is also glorious and perfect. In fact, His holiness is so breathtaking that men cannot bear the sight of it. And surely God’s grace, which enables all believers to approach Him directly, is equally awe-inspiring. The Father’s deep, tender love offers more evidence of His perfection, and these three characteristics—holiness, grace, and love—only begin to scratch the surface of all God’s glorious attributes.

Finally, heaven, the place destined for God’s children, is ultimate perfection and beauty. The walls of New Jerusalem consist of thirteen precious jewels, and the streets are paved with gold. (Rev. 21) However, heaven will not be mere physical beauty. By promising spiritual perfection in oneness with our Creator, the hope of heaven gives an otherwise meaningless life

purpose.

“There . . . remains a rest for the people of God.” (Heb. 4:9) Thanks to our Father, we do not have to live a hopeless life of drudgery. Through God’s grace we can hope to become truly beautiful and perfect, just as we were created to be. He is truly the Alpha and Omega, the last word in perfection and beauty. And, most certainly, our perfect Lord defies all human proverbs.