

Our Beautiful Savior

(Isaiah 53:1) Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?

(Isaiah 53:2) For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

The Book of Isaiah is so replete with references to Jesus Christ and His work of redemption that it could almost be called “The Gospel of Isaiah.” Such a conclusion would not be unwarranted, for the Apostle Paul, when quoting two passages of Isaiah's prophecy (ISA 52:7; ISA 53:1) said the following:

Romans 10:15-16 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! (16) But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

This 53rd chapter of the Book of Isaiah is famous for its Messianic character: descriptive of His advent, His rejection by men, His substitutionary sufferings and death, His burial, and His satisfaction of the Father. It is indeed a wonder that when He *came unto His own* who *received Him not* (JOH 1:11) and whose descendants to this day will not receive Him because such a humiliated non-political figure is likewise not what they expect of Messiah, that any of them who had ever read this chapter of Isaiah's prophecy could miss the obvious: Messiah's glory was not according to the flesh or this world. Isaiah, like all the prophets, had the Spirit of Christ which “...did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should FOLLOW” (1PE 1:11). “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” (LUK 24:26). His glory was not thwarted by His sufferings; it *followed* as a result of His sufferings. God “...raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory...” (1PE 1:21) so that believers see Him now “...crowned with glory and honour” (HEB 2:9). The gospel declarations of a suffering, humiliated and rejected Messiah are “...none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer...” (ACT 26:22-23). But, “...if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (LUK 16:31).

For the purposes of today's meditation, let us focus upon another reason that Christ was rejected of men, to wit, this rare description of Messiah's looks from today's text: “...he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him” (v. 2). By the term “rare description” I mean that for all that was written about Messiah (Christ) in the Scriptures, there is virtually nothing said about His mien, i.e., how He looked. Unlike men who habitually take pains to describe the appearance of the subjects of their biographies, the Holy Spirit provides us with scant information about such attributes of Christ. Given man's propensity for idolatrous images “...made like to corruptible man...” (ROM 1:23), detailed description of every aspect of the corruption-free Jesus' appearance would have undoubtedly exacerbated the problem.

What little the Holy Spirit does provide does not exactly lend itself to the conclusion that Jesus was some stunningly handsome upper-class strongman that would make women swoon, give guys a “man-crush” and so “obviously” be the Christ of God. We can discern from Scripture that Jesus as a human *increased in stature* (LUK 2:52) but ISA 53:2 indicates that His growth before God would be somewhat stunted or wiry, “...as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground.” This is not to imply that He was a helpless weakling since He seems to have been a carpenter before He entered public ministry

(MAR 6:3), and such a trade would have required physical strength. He obviously had enough strength to overturn moneychangers' tables and drive the moneychangers and merchants from the temple (JOH 2:13-15). But He did not have to be Mr. Olympia to overturn the tables, and a wiry man with a scourge (whip) and the zeal of God's house eating him up (JOH 2:17) could clear out the sinners quickly. Scripture emphasizes that Christ "...grew, and waxed **strong in spirit**, filled with wisdom..." (LUK 2:40); His growth was defined by His character, not His biceps. Our text today shows that Christ would not have an appealing *form* (The visible aspect of a thing.... occasionally, the shape or figure of the body as distinguished from the face). Scripture speaks of God's disinclination to glory, like men do, in the chiseled human form (1SAM 16:7; PSA 147:10), "...neither let the mighty man glory in his might..." (JER 9:23). Messiah further would be without *comeliness* (Pleasing appearance; gracefulness or beauty of form; handsomeness) that would provoke sensual admiration in men: "...there is NO beauty that we should desire him."

Believers should forever dismiss the notion that Jesus Christ looked like the popular depictions of Him that conjure up thoughts of an estrogen-overloaded love-child of Yanni and Michelle Pfeiffer who might have been a poster-child for gender reassignment surgery. Preachers should steer clear of any teaching which implies that Jesus Christ was the epitome of human comeliness. The prophet Isaiah, while mocking the folly of idolaters, noted how that they fashioned their idol gods "...after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man..." (ISA 44:13). So perverse is the thinking of natural man that he would likely conclude that a wicked rebel with political smarts like Absalom (of whom it was said, "...there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty..." 2SAM 14:25) must be God's anointed Messiah.

Jesus Christ was THE Man because of His unwavering commitment to what was good and right, not because He was a Saul who stood "...higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward" (1SAM 10:23). He was not the Man because He was the quintessential Samson, slaying a thousand with the jawbone of an ass (JDG 15:16). He was not the Man because He was endowed with the *ruddy* (naturally suffused with a fresh or healthy redness), beautiful countenance of David (1SAM 16:12). God was not sending Israel (or us) another Moses, the mediator of the first covenant. Moses was born a "...**goodly** child..." (EXO 2:2), i.e., "Of good appearance; good-looking, well-favoured or proportioned; comely, fair, handsome." Stephen tells us that he was "...exceeding **fair**..." (ACT 7:20), i.e., "Beautiful to the eye; of pleasing form or appearance; good-looking." Paul says he was "...a **proper** child..." (HEB 11:23), i.e., "Of goodly appearance or make; fine-looking, 'fine', good-looking, handsome, well-made, elegant, comely,..." Moses evidently was a strikingly good-looking child and this appears to have been some sort of a token to his parents so that, seeing him to be of such outstanding appearance they were persuaded to defy Pharaoh and hide him. And thus the carnal-minded were set up to despise and reject the homely Messiah Whose beauty was not in His looks but in His holy, blameless, harmless, selfless character: utterly dedicated to *please not Himself* (ROM 15:3) but His Father Whom He *always pleased* (JOH 8:29).

Against all this it might be argued that the Psalmist prophesied of Christ, "Thou art fairer than the children of men..." (PSA 45:2). But it is evident that the Psalmist is seeing Messiah as He *now* is in His GLORY, not in His *humility* at the first advent. He sees Messiah in His *majesty* (PSA 45:3-4), which is "The dignity or greatness of a sovereign; sovereign power, sovereignty." Peter, when reflecting on the time when he saw Jesus *in glory* on the Mount of Transfiguration (LUK 9:28-36), said that the disciples were then "...eyewitnesses of his **majesty**" (2PE 1:16). Further proof that the Psalmist is seeing the glorified Christ is that PSA 45:6 is shown to be relevant to His exaltation on the throne as a result of

His resurrection (HEB 1:3-9 c/w ACT 13:32-34).

The godly who fear and trust God are promised, "...Thine eyes shall see **the king in his beauty**: they shall behold **the land that is very far off**" (ISA 33:13-17). Once again, the beauty of the king is associated with the glory state, not earth. Jesus parabolically described His removal from earth to heaven as "...a man travelling into a **far country**..." (MAT 25:14). Abraham is now in heaven, a place "...**afar off**..." (LUK 16:23). It is there where the faithful shall see His beauty. ISA 33:18 goes on to say, "Thine heart shall meditate terror. Where is the scribe? where is the receiver? where is he that counted the towers?" This verse is quoted by Paul in 1CO 1:20, the context of which shows that the preaching of *Christ crucified* is repulsive to the natural man and that God is disposed to use base and despised things to confound the wise and mighty --- a fitting parallel to the uncomely form in which Christ appeared and was despised and rejected.

Jesus Christ was and is the Perfect Man (EPH 4:13), beautiful for His goodness, not His glamour. Let us worship Him in the "...beauty of holiness" (PSA 29:2) rather than the *holiness of beauty*. Let us live according to the same order, for our good looks will neither save us nor glorify God and how shall we fare when an injury disfigures us or God through His sundry judgments turns our comeliness into corruption?

Give glory to our truly beautiful Savior, our great hero Who was and is everything that a man should be, in defiance of the carnal standards by which sinners measure a man.

(All definitions are from The Oxford English Dictionary)