

## **“The Unattractive Messiah”**

### **Isaiah 53: 1-3**

Dr. Richard J. Alberta

Cornerstone Evangelical Presbyterian Church

Brighton, Michigan 48114

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**Text: Isaiah 53:1-3 (NIV) <sup>1</sup> Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? <sup>2</sup> He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.**

To begin on a light note today, it's nice to be back. A couple of weeks ago, while in Phoenix, we watched a sermon on Live Stream preached by Pastor Winans. It was good. I liked it. It was funny because he opened by telling a story about how...some years back...he had to dress up in a medieval gown when he was playing music at some fancy wedding in New York City. He showed the church a photograph of himself and he admitted that he looked really, really dorky. And he did! It was funny.

It was also funny because, after all, we are a people very conscious of what we look like. Our appearance demands a lot of our attention. Our title slide shows us a beautiful woman looking at herself. We all like pretty and we all like handsome people. We all wonder how we are appearing to others.

Speaking of our appearance, while we were in Arizona, just for fun, I decide not to shave for a few days. I thought it might be interesting to see how I'd look with a beard. After almost a week things were looking pretty desperate. I think I needed to put turf builder or something on my face but it **was** growing in...all gray. So, one morning I asked our eight-year-old Tyler how did I look? He just stared a moment and said "Like an old serial killer!" (Cute kid.) That night I shaved it all off. The next day I said "So Tyler...I shaved it all off...how do I look now?" And he said "Like a young serial killer!" I thought "Well...so much for trying to change my appearance. God probably likes me just as I am with or without a beard." But let's consider that issue today...not my appearance or your appearance but the appearance of the Messiah. True...we have no photos but we do have a description. It is found here in the prophecy of Isaiah and it is in the Word of God for a purpose. In fact, a critical purpose that helps us understand the working of God in salvation. First, let us pray.

The Prophet Isaiah lived in the Southern Kingdom of Israel around 700 BC. His name meant "Yahweh Saves!" Isaiah wrote about the Holiness of God in an ungodly era in history. He foresaw the exile that God's people would endure a century later. And in the middle of all of his concerns for his people...in the middle of his angst about what he could see coming...in

the middle of his long list of reasons for concern...we find the Prophet speaking about someone who would come...sent by God...to be the Savior...the Messiah. But from the very moment his message began those listening could sense that he was introducing a totally unexpected idea. In three verses, the Prophet foretold a great deal about this Messiah to come. Something perhaps... very surprising. Before going further, let me tell you a story... a true story.

Years ago, I knew a sister in Christ named Hazel Hunt. Hazel was the most beautiful woman I ever saw... apart from my wife Donna! When Hazel walked into a room it would light up. Everything about her sparkled from her smile to her very gentle words. Everyone loved Hazel and her heart for Christ was obvious to each person she met. Hazel never won a beauty pageant but she was beautiful. I'll tell you what I mean by that...in a little while. Back to Isaiah the Prophet.

The Prophets spoke for God. Not only to foretell what God was going to bring about but to speak out about God's mind. In a sense, a preacher who is filled with the Holy Spirit is acting as a prophet...a proclaimer of God's truth... a messenger sent from God. But what happens with anyone who speaks regularly is this: their audience begins to expect certain things to be said...sort of like listening to the same news person on a cable channel. But in this section, verses one thru three, Isaiah is about to say something that they have never heard and do not expect...and something they certainly would find surprising...perhaps even shocking. And what was that? Consider his opening words:

**<sup>1</sup> Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?**

Now...how often have you heard someone say "Oh...you're not gonna' believe this!" Such as last week when the power was out and someone said "Oh you're not gonna' believe this but the power might be out until Sunday!" That's a part of what is happening here at this point. Isaiah is saying "**Who has believed our message?**" That might be translated "Who can believe our message?" Or "Who **WILL** believe this message?" "Who can believe what I am about to say?" The whole point is that he is about to say something very, very unexpected. Actually, possibly...something unbelievable! Next he asks "**To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?**" That was a way of saying "Who can understand God's way of doing things?" The "arm of the Lord" amounts to the "ways" of the Lord...how God does things. So, Isaiah is opening his comments with this idea: "What I'm about to say to you may seem unbelievable and you are going to ask if this is really the way God does things?"

In the New Living Translation, it reads: **Isaiah 53:1 (NLT) "Who has believed our message? To whom has the LORD revealed his powerful arm?"** We must not move too fast right here. Isaiah is saying that there are some things that many people cannot believe when they hear them. NOW...this is critical. If we are going to understand the Word of God...and if we would understand the reality of salvation...why most people reject the offer of Christ...we

need to grasp this truth: we must accept and keep in mind that only God's elect people will be given the insights that enable the believer to be... a believer! Isaiah is pointing towards that great truth. He is bringing Glory to God by pointing out that God does not do things in the way we would expect. Isaiah says right up front that this information about the Messiah will be frankly impossible for most people to believe. This reality ... that God's truth is only received by those whom God is calling is found times in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For example, one day Jesus said to his disciples that the truths of the Kingdom of God are actually only understood by those who are able to break the code. Without a work of the Holy Spirit, people will hear but not understand. Like hearing an unknown language. As Isaiah himself said later:

**Isaiah 6:9 (NIV) He said, "Go and tell this people: "Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving."**

Think of it this way please: if I say to you "Je vous fais une lettre, que vous lirez peut-etre si vous avez le temps!" That is quite meaningless nonsense if you cannot understand French. I just said "I am writing you a letter that you will read perhaps...if you have the time!" But I might ask myself "Will anyone understand what I am saying?" The same with the hidden message of the Gospel. The speaker knows that not everyone will understand the meaning. Jesus taught that same truth. Consider this:

**Matthew 13:10-11 (NIV) <sup>10</sup> The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" <sup>11</sup> He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them."**

Jesus just said that understanding the secrets of the Kingdom is a gift from God not given to everyone. I think Isaiah is saying the same kind of thing here. In part, because the message will make no sense to most people. So...he opens up with this question almost as if he is saying "I suspect that most people will not get what I am trying to say!" He writes:

**<sup>1</sup> Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?**

Does any of this long introduction matter to us as Christians just trying to grow in the Lord and please him and enjoy his Lordship in our lives? Yes! Here is why it matters. Because our starting point must always be one of humility before God because we would not be Christians if it were not for a work of grace on the part of God! We would not believe the message. Jesus said:

**Matthew 11:27 (NIV) "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."**

So, God must reveal Himself and the mysteries of the Kingdom of God to us. Yet... even with the grace of God, there are elements of the message that are hard to accept or grasp. Ok... now Isaiah begins to tell his readers what is so unbelievable about his message... about the coming Messiah. Isaiah speaks of the future coming of Christ but he speaks as if it is already history and has happened. Since God is outside of time, that is somehow mysteriously reasonable. He begins his inspired biographical sketch about the Messiah... the Savior who would come into the world seven centuries later. He says:

**<sup>2</sup> He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.**

What's he driving at here? Picture Jesus. From the moment of his conception, he would be vulnerable and in danger. He would be like a tender shoot... .fragile... .not impressive in size or appearance. "Out of dry ground" .... What comes out of dry ground? Not much that is pretty! We were just in Arizona again and the sky is blue and the mountains impressive but to me... the cactus is a left over from God's drawing board. They are hard surfaced and often lonely in a bed of dirt and sand. Some people find them beautiful but I do not. In fact, roots often do not come out of dry ground and if they do they are not delicate! So, the picture of the Messiah shows him likened to a plant... but not one that is a beautiful flower blossoming in rich dark soil surrounded by lush grass! Rather, it is a picture of small little tender cactus pushing up alone in the desert. It is not a picture of beauty. So, Isaiah goes on to say more in his unbelievable description of the Messiah to come:

**He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.**

It's been said many times that if Jesus tried out for a role in Hollywood to play himself, he would have been rejected. Where the text says the word "beauty" (Grk. "mar-eh") means shape and form. When did you last watch a news show on cable and see an anchor woman who was not beautiful? There is no question that people with physical beauty have greater job opportunities and more popularity and make friends more easily.

An article in Psychology today in March of 2012 was titled "The Truth About Why Beautiful People are More Successful." The writer goes on to study income and opportunities and speculates about how important physical attraction is in our society. He writes:

**"The research...shows that attractive people, both men and women, earn an average of 3 or 4% more than people with below average looks, which adds up to a significant amount of money over a lifetime. Beautiful people are also hired sooner, get promotions more quickly, and are higher-ranking in their companies..."**

This preference for physical beauty is not something new in the world. Even the Bible speaks of those who were beautiful or handsome and well-built. History says that Cleopatra, the

consort of Julius Caesar, had a hundred servants devoted to finding precious oils and lotions and tending to her physical regimen. But the Messiah?

**He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.**

He was not beautiful or handsome and we must not overlook this: there was nothing majestic about him! The word used means “splendor!” If they had dressed up the Messiah in beautiful robes he still would not have looked the part of a king! It’s been said that Lincoln could never be elected today because of his strange face and odd way of walking. Lincoln once said “My opponent accuses me of being two-faced! Do you think if I had two faces I would wear this one?” He did not become President because of his looks. But let’s be honest. That often enters into the voters’ minds.

No, Jesus was never afforded the respect and affection of people who saw him as having majesty. He was too unattractive to be placed upon a throne or given a robe to wear. Except once...exactly once... Jesus was treated like a king. You’ll remember...

Pilate has tried to get Jesus acquitted of the charges brought by the Jews saying he must be put to death for blasphemy. Pilate is puzzled and he speaks with Jesus about his being a king. We read:

**John 18:36-37 (NIV) <sup>36</sup> Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." <sup>37</sup> "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."**

So, now Pilate comes out and says to those accusing Jesus “Here is your king!” and they shout “Take him away! Take him away! We have no king but Caesar! Crucify him!” (John 19: 14-15). They saw no majesty in Jesus. But in a great Divine irony the brutal soldiers actually coronated Jesus as the King. We read:

**John 19:2-3 (NIV) <sup>2</sup> The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe <sup>3</sup> and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they struck him in the face.**

It was the privileged task of the soldiers in the ancient world to bring the king his robe and honor him and pledge to defend him. But he had no beauty or majesty and no one could picture him as a king. The irony is that the cruel soldiers got it right. He *was* their king... but unattractive men are rejected as king and struck in the face over and over and over.

**He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.**

Little wonder Isaiah opened his prophecy by saying to the people “This you will find hard to believe! The one you are waiting for will not appeal to you in any outward manner.” And he will be unattractive in how he even carries himself. Will he be a man of positive personality? A great cheerleader for the people? One with charm and charisma? Will he be the kind of leader people are drawn to and want to gather around? Will he speak in such a way as to please the crowds and receive great cheers? In other words, will his personality be attractive... this Messiah to come? No. Not at all. The prophet goes on to say:

**<sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.**

Hated. Despised. Rejected. Filled with sorrow. Suffering. But not sorrowful because of the way he was treated or because of rejection. Filled with sorrow over the world of sin. Remember Jesus standing at the tomb of his friend Lazarus and weeping? Remember Jesus saying quietly as he looked out over Jerusalem:

**Matthew 23:37-38 (NIV) “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. <sup>38</sup> Look, your house is left to you desolate.”**

Jesus was rejected for his appearance and rejected for his message and rejected for his love of the Father and hatred of sin. He was the unattractive Messiah... a man of sorrows. Yet, he was the most beautiful of men whose very being totally challenges us to re-arrange our priorities and challenges our values.

When Samuel was looking for someone to succeed Saul as king over Israel, he examined all of the men seeking one with just the right bearing and appeal. King David was actually a good looking young man. But that was not why he became the king. Samuel was looking at his older brother Eliab who was physically impressive. We read:

**1 Samuel 16:6-7 (NIV) <sup>6</sup> When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD."**

Of course, Eliab had all the necessary traits apparently. He could have been a host on Fox News or Morning Joe! But Samuel was wrong. We read:

**<sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."**

Hazel Hunt was a beautiful sister in the Lord. Filled with good cheer and tending to God's

people. Hazel was a severely deformed hunchback who walked literally with her eyes facing the floor but looking up to spread good cheer. Jesus was that way too...unattractive. Next week we will consider that this unattractive Messiah was also the misunderstood Messiah. Then we will begin a four week series considering Easter. Jesus. The Unattractive Messiah.

**Man of sorrows what a name  
for the Son of God, who came  
ruined sinners to reclaim:  
Hallelujah, what a Savior!**

Let us pray.