

June 21st

He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. -Isaiah 53:2

When we think of being attracted to someone, we often think of romance. But the relationship between attractiveness and romance is not always related to things like red roses and Cupid. Seeing something romantically can also mean seeing something as ideal. To have romantic notions about someone or something means we see only what we want to see and ignore things that may be more problematic. Consider this conception of romance and attractiveness in light of Isaiah 53:2. We find in Isaiah 53 a description (which actually begins in 52:13) of a person who was coming to bear the people's "griefs" and carry their "sorrows" (53:4). The New Testament writers rightly saw in this passage a prophecy of the Messiah (cf. Matthew 8:17; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Acts 8:32-33; Romans 10:16; 15:21; 1 Peter 2:22). Not surprisingly, many who read about this "man of sorrows" are moved by the heroic tragedy of such a character. Indeed, many of the New Testament's descriptions of Jesus can inspire both sorrow and exultation: Jesus as the outcast, Jesus as the rebel, and Jesus as the gentle shepherd. In response to these descriptions, poets and writers have long been inspired by the marvel of Christ's 'rags to riches' story; from peasant teacher to cosmic sovereign. Even to a lesser degree, Christians are often drawn to Jesus the friend, the one who affirms us and loves us when maybe others do not. Now all of these depictions of Christ are based in truth. Christ was an outcast and a rebel. Jesus is both a king and a friend. But when we consider all of this in light of Isaiah 53:2, our romantic notions about Jesus should quickly be wiped away. The man that Isaiah foretold was not a man who could be neatly placed in our romantic categories. He was simply not appealing in that way. He was not esteemed, He was despised (53:3). This does not mean that Jesus was not any of the things we previously mentioned, or that those aspects of His character are not appealing. What Isaiah 53:2 should force us to consider is why it is we were attracted to Jesus in the first place. What is it about Him that continues to mesmerize us? If our attraction to Jesus and our desire to follow Him is inspired by romantic notions, then we will be in for a rude awakening when He says, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head", or "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God", or even "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:57-62) The reality of discipleship to the One who was despised is what makes the gospel "foolishness" to those who are perishing (1 Corinthians 1:18). Our love for and obedience to Jesus must be based on the reality of who Jesus is and what He expects, and not on an idea of Him that demands little and affirms much. Jesus came to "bring a sword" (Matthew 10:34), but also to provide new life for those who, in faith, would be first willing to taste its blade of death.

Help us to live for and love you, Father, not simply the idea of you.