

Introduction

I'd like to begin by showing you a picture of Jesus. This one has something in common with every other picture of Him I've ever seen. It's that He's good looking. Have you ever seen a picture that portrayed Him as not good looking – either average looking or even ugly? I never have.

There's an obvious reason for that. It's because that's how all or almost all of us imagine Him in our minds – as good looking. We imagine Him as someone who could be a model and appear in advertisements or on the cover of magazines.

That raises an instructive question. Why do we imagine Him that way? The Bible doesn't address how He looked. So what is it about us that makes us imagine Him that way? It's that we treasure beauty that meets the eye. But in the passage I read, Matthew 6:28-33, Jesus teaches us that there's more to beauty than meets the eye and that's what I'm going to preach about today. Turn to that passage please.

Beauty Defined and Applied

In it, Jesus comments on things that secular people worry about. One of those is found in verse 27. He asks a question, **"And who of you by being worried can add a single cubit to his height?"** I can certainly relate to that because that was probably my biggest worry growing up. I told you before that I was 4'10" tall and weighed 85 pounds in 10th grade. I fretted constantly about that and here's why. It's because everyone else treasured height and consequently so did I.

After asking us about our height in verse 27, Jesus asks us about our clothing in verse 28a. He then goes on to speak to both of those issues in verses 28b-30. What He says in those verses shows us that He has more in mind than just height in particular. Height in particular is just one aspect of physical appearance in general and that's what He has in mind here – physical appearance in general.

What He talks about in that regard is beauty. We all know what

beauty is don't we? It's the condition or state of being good looking, either attractive or handsome. While people may differ on some aspects of beauty, there are objective criteria by which it can be judged.

Take faces as an example of what I mean. Three factors determine how attractive or unattractive our faces are head on: symmetry, proportion, and placement. Then there are our facial profiles, the side view. Human beings have three basic profile types. The first two are considered flawed and the third ideal. If I showed them to you, you'd agree with that assessment. Putting it all together, one surgeon points out that 67% of people have flawed faces that need plastic surgery. That's two out of every three of us who are here today.

The fact is that most of us, including me, aren't physically beautiful. Almost none of us are 9's or 10's. Almost all of us are 6's or below.

Beauty that Meets the Eye

But what does it matter? If we believe our culture, it's "a lot." Our culture, you see, treasures beauty that meets the eye. Examine what you read in print and see and hear on television. You'll discover one of our culture's strongest myths if you do. It's that physical attractiveness is the key to success. This myth contends that anyone can be materially, psychologically, and socially happy once a certain level of attractiveness is achieved. But what if we don't achieve that?

Maybe you remember Randy Newman's highly publicized song "Short People" that came out in 1977. Its lyrics describe the many deficiencies that short people, like me I guess, exhibit. One line, for example, says: **"They got little hands and little eyes and they walk around tellin' great big lies."** That line is typical of the song. It essentially pronounces that short people really have no reason to exist.

"Short people" typifies our culture's attitude toward those who don't achieve attractiveness. They're pitiful indeed. Dallas Willard describes this attitude well in *The Divine Conspiracy*. He writes, **"If you look at advertising and current events in the print and other media . . .**

you might think that the most unfortunate people in the world today are the fat, the misshapen, the bald, the ugly, and the old"

Willard is right. Our culture treasures beauty that meets the eye. One of the greatest misfortunes that can befall us, therefore, is not to have it or to have it but lose it, which everyone who has it eventually does.

But that isn't the way it is in the kingdom of God. The contrast is a sharp one. The kingdom of God treasures beauty that doesn't meet the eye. And that's exactly what Jesus discusses in verses 28b-30. In verse 29, He mentions "Solomon in all his glory." The equivalent for us is the most beautiful people we can think of made up "to a T," like actors and actresses at the Oscar awards. He then goes on to say in verse 29 that the beauty of Solomon or those actors and actresses can't even begin to compare to the beauty of the flowers of the field. But as great as that beauty is, He concludes in verse 30, He will clothe us with a beauty that that simply overwhelms it, one that doesn't meet the eye.

Now, this beauty that doesn't meet the eye is of two kinds. Let's examine what they are and how we should respond to them.

Beauty that Doesn't Meets the Eye – Natural Beauty

The first kind is natural beauty. The word natural is important. It conveys that it's inherent in us all. Every person on the face of the earth has it. The natural beauty I'm talking about is this. Each of us is an immortal for whom God has an eternal destiny. Hear that again and don't ever forget it. Each of us is an immortal person for whom God has an eternal destiny.

I'd say two things about that natural beauty. One is that it's the single most significant fact about us. Our outer beauty is of little account beside it. The other is that our outer appearance has absolutely no bearing on it at all. In 2007, *People Magazine* named Matt Damon "the sexiest man alive." Compare him to a toothless raggedly clad street person I saw at the library. Notice I said "compare" not "contrast." That's because Damon and the street person have an identical "natural"

beauty. Both are immortals for whom God has an eternal destiny. Note two things. The one's good looks and the other's bad looks are of little account beside that fact. And the one's good looks and the other's bad looks have no bearing on that fact at all.

Now that we know what the first kind of beauty is, let's take a look at how we should respond to it. We should do two things.

First, judge our personal worth by natural not outer beauty.

Some of us don't you know. We don't judge our personal worth by natural beauty. We judge it by outer beauty instead. We think and feel that bulging waistlines, thinning hair, bad complexion, wrinkles, birthmarks, and so on make us personally and unconditionally condemned. We think and feel as if we're beyond the reach of human acceptability, that we're inferior, because of it. But we aren't. Our natural beauty makes us inferior to no one and we need to act accordingly. So, we don't judge our own personal worth by how attractive or unattractive we are. We don't think more highly of ourselves because we are attractive or less highly of ourselves because we aren't.

We should respond to natural beauty by doing a second thing. Judge the personal worth of others by natural not outer beauty.

Maybe you've heard of "Physical Attractiveness Phenomenon," also called "lookism." Gordon Patzer, who is considered an expert on the subject, defines it this way. It's **"treating people in ways biased by their level of physical attractiveness; with benefits to individuals higher in physical attractiveness and detriments to individuals lower in physical attractiveness."** The result of that, according to Patzer, is that small differences in looks translate regularly into big consequences in life.

He's right about that. James Dobson, for instance, observes that most people give attractive children more attention than they do unattractive children. Then there are studies that show that people consistently equate outer beauty with inner beauty. They perceive attractive people as having more positive qualities of character and

unattractive people as having less. The bottom line is that most people, in practice, judge the personal worth of others by outer beauty.

But as followers of Jesus, we shouldn't. Never give the attractive more favorable treatment and the unattractive less. Always give the same favorable treatment to all. Judge the personal worth of others by natural beauty and treat them as it demands we should.

So that's the first kind of beauty – natural – and how we should respond to it - judge the personal worth of others and us by it.

Beauty that Doesn't Meet the Eye – Inner Beauty

The second kind is inner beauty – of the soul. A beautiful soul is one that's defining and controlling qualities are love, peace, and joy.

That's the kind of beauty Jesus has primarily in mind here in verse 30. The setting itself shows that. Matthew 5:1 reveals to whom He is speaking. It's "the crowds." These crowds were the masses that the Pharisees derisively called "the people of the land." Author Donald Spoto describes their lot in life this way: **"People who survived to adulthood often lost limbs and teeth or were otherwise deformed due to poor diet, birth defects, war or assault."** That helps us imagine what the crowds looked like. They weren't a pretty sight to be sure. The majority of them were dirty grubby people with little or no "looks" at all.

But Jesus tells them something here they had never heard before and it must have stunned them. They could be beautiful. He isn't talking about outer beauty, of the body. He's talking about inner beauty, of the soul. He had taught them in Matthew 4:17 that they could access God and His kingdom by deciding to follow Him. And now He teaches them that something spectacular will happen if they do. Their souls will shine so brightly that their bodies – missing teeth, crooked noses, blotched skin, deformed arms and all - will be hardly visible.

I read about three studies that were conducted to determine this - how non-physical traits influence people's perception of physical attractiveness. Participants were asked to rate a person's physical

attractiveness. Those who knew and liked the person consistently rated him or her more physically attractive than those who didn't. Conversely, those who knew and disliked the person consistently rated him or her more physically unattractive than those who didn't. The studies concluded the same thing. There is more to beauty than meets the eye. Non-physical traits, qualities of character, that we know strongly influence how attractive or unattractive we perceive people to be.

That psychological phenomenon underlies what Jesus says in verse 30. If we become disciples of His, He'll transform our souls so that love, peace, and joy flow from us. That in turn will dramatically alter how people perceive us. If someone were to ask me to rate the 10 most beautiful people of the 20th century, for instance, Princess Diana wouldn't be one of them. But a common ordinary looking woman, my mother Ruby Murphy, would. Her inner beauty shone so brightly that it made her body hardly visible at all. Ask anyone who knew her and they'll tell you how beautiful she was.

And we can be too. How? Jesus tells us in verse 33. It's by seeking His kingdom and righteousness first. His righteousness has many aspects, one of which is beauty of the soul. So we seek that, not outer beauty, first. First, we make having an inner beauty of soul one of the principal aims of our lives. Second, we learn what the means are for achieving that aim, which I can help you with if you ask. And third, we carry out those means. The Holy Spirit will create a beauty of soul within us if we do, one that makes our bodies hardly visible at all.

Conclusion

I end the way I began – with how Jesus looked. The truth is that it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter whether He was good looking, average looking, or ugly. If it didn't for Him, then it doesn't for us. It doesn't matter at all if we're 10's, 5's or even 1's. Why? It's because there's something far more important than beauty that meets the eye. It's beauty that doesn't meet the eye – and in Jesus, all of us can have it.