

## Exceeding Expectations

"Think you got a bad deal?"

"Well, yeah. You know, we worked a long time and man was it hot! I mean, we've been at it all day. And so when we saw those other guys get a whole day's wages for just one hour, well... well we expected MORE." (See Matt 20)

"How about you? You look a bit disappointed."

"Well, of course. Hey, I worked every day, day after day, so faithfully, so doggedly... you could always depend on me. And what's more, I never even asked for a big reward. But, but, then my brother shows up – he wasted half the family fortune, and then he comes back looking for handouts. And, Dad just throws a party? Disappointed? I expected MORE." (See Luke 15)

"Hi there. What's got you down?"

"Huh? Down? Mister, are you the only guy around who doesn't know what's happened?? Man, let me tell you, down doesn't describe it! We thought we were dealing with the real thing – you know, the Big Cheese – the Messiah! We left everything and followed him but now, well ... now we don't know what to think. I'll tell you, we sure expected MORE." (See Luke 24)

Bitterness. The result of shattered expectations.

From the days of Adam until now, the expectations of godly men and women can be summarized in the person of Jesus Christ -- Who He is, what He does, all that He represents. Most of us would agree however, that some of the expectations of the godly aren't so

'godly'. Rather, we can nest them in selfishness, impatience, covetousness or misunderstanding and as a consequence be very disappointed with God and with each other.

The big deal, the important lesson for us, is to be aware that shattered expectations are one of Satan's favorite tools. They can lead to a loose grip on faith and even a turning away from the Lord. One of the great dangers of the whole so-called 'faith movement' – the name it and claim it teachings – is this very thing. Many people have been duped into this 'hyper-faith' mindset only to run into a 'brick wall' spiritually. They fail, they think, in faith. Or worse, they think God has failed. Their expectations, nurtured and trained in the wrong school, are dashed.

Of course, this does NOT make them themselves ungodly, but simply exposes some of their expectations as being something other than 'heaven-sent'.

But even in the broader scope, so many have turned away from God because they're angry and/or disappointed. They lost their job, they wanted something deeply, they're grieving the loss of a loved one – the list is quite long of ways we can mistakenly believe that we or God fail in this whole notion of expectations. There are missionaries that have been 'burned', pastors' children who wander, pastors who 'drop-out', believers who just disappear – the church has plenty of 'aching body parts' if you would.

And then there are those who haven't even entered in; they're never born again because something or someone disappointed their expectation. That then becomes a

convenient tool of the enemy in turning them away from salvation.

Most of us can relate – bitterness born from disappointment... I'll give an example -- we were in Greece. In our home, Darlene gave birth to our little boy John Lance. In our early twenties, we were endeavoring to serve the Lord in a distant land, believing that our efforts were in His will and pleasing to Him. God had done so many wonderful miracles in our rather young spiritual lives that we simply believed... well, believed that despite any impending doom or dire circumstances that He would always step in and 'save the day' so to speak. He always had.

Then our little one got sick...very sick. Denial set in and as he grew weaker denial gave way to confusion. We had no money for a doctor – no money at all. Surely, he would be all right. God would heal him.

But the next day, as I held him in my lap, he just stopped breathing and went all blue. I didn't know what to do. Darlene was crying uncontrollably. I tried breathing into his mouth and in a few seconds, he started breathing again. Immediately, we went to the hospital.

The doctors told us that he had septicemia and meningitis. About six weeks later, he died.

After a year, we returned to the States having being abroad for six years or so. We still loved the Lord and still wanted to serve Him. Darlene was pregnant again. Officially, we came back just to get better healthcare, but in retrospect, it was also a festering distrust of God's care born out of a shattered

expectation. We were thoroughly confused about what to believe.

Mixed with the joy of salvation and the memories of His wonderful bona fide miracles were the pain of grief, the image of our son's suffering and our helplessness as well as the terrible sobbings of my precious wife.

There were those who said he died because of our lack of faith. I don't know where people get this garbage. Not from the Bible! That misguided theology portrays our heavenly Father like some sort of referee who times our spiritual race or watches how high we can jump so that when we fail – and we will fail – he can bring devastating judgment upon us. It actually fosters a 'works-trip' and labels it faith.

Now, I'm not saying faith isn't important – to the contrary, it's critical. But the scripture says specifically that to each one of the saints is given a measure of faith with which to work. (Romans 12:3) God knows your measure of faith because He gave it to you. He won't test you to a greater degree than you can handle. (1 Cor 10:13) The greater faith is not that which sees the miracle but that which persists despite contrary circumstances. Just consider the martyrs.

Anyway, we came back to the States and I did a spiritual 'belly-flop' if you would in the cesspool of worldliness. I made a horrible display of myself and got many of those around me 'all wet' too. I still looked to the Lord, but my behavior was incongruent and led to much hurt. However, *"It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed,*

*because his compassions fail not.*" (Lam 3:22) and I praise Him that He healed my heart and turned me around. That was 26 years ago.

Now there was nothing 'ungodly' about our hope or expectation that God would heal our son. Bitterness however developed because I took my eyes off the cross. I was short-sighted. Let me explain:

In Exodus, the host of Israel were riding a wave. They had seen miracle after miracle after miracle during their liberation from slavery. Pharaoh's army was annihilated under the Red Sea and for a short time the people were buoyant with shallow faith. Then, after just three days of 'roughing it' in the wilderness exhilaration turned to desperation. Just after praising God in the Song of Moses and the Song of Miriam, the people found poison in the waters of Marah (literally, bitter).

*"So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, 'What shall we drink?'"*

The people as yet were pampered in a way. Their faith was untested – most everything had gone their way so to speak. Sure, some of the exodus was pretty 'hairy', pretty tense – but until then, the miracle – working power of God had just 'flowed'. Here, in the wilderness, they were seriously dry. The waters of Marah were a huge and life threatening disappointment. But a

wonderful picture was being painted – *"So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet."*

The chemistry here is clear – the Tree, when it was cast into the bitter waters, made them sweet. And the same is true now – as ever – the Tree is the *cross of Calvary*. Peter wrote of Jesus – *"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."* (1 Pet 2:24) And Luke recorded, *"... when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre."* (Acts 13:29)

When our expectations are born of true faith and held to by faith, there is no disappointment or shame. (See Romans 5:5) But how is that faith secured? The Tree. We must apply the Tree. That's not a formula for getting what we want but a cure for the bitterness of myopic expectations. We've got to grasp the fundamental truth of what Christ accomplished there – life from death, an entrance into the awesome presence of God Almighty, an eternal mind-boggling inheritance in heaven, the determined end of all evil, universal reconciliation, ... on and on it goes. My small mind needs help to comprehend this – that's why the psalmist sang, *"My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him."* (Psalm 62)

Herein is a key to consider. David spoke to his soul – that part of the believer which is influenced both by the Spirit and by the flesh. He averred to wait only upon God. This waiting was literally a sitting silent

before God. He acknowledged that his expectation was from the Almighty. It had to be divine to be realizable. You see, in our carnality or fleshly human nature, we are influenced to entertain all kinds of earthly expectations or godly expectations that are 'fuzzy', incomplete. But the soul must be guided by the Spirit of God here.

It seems that when it comes to Jesus, nearly everyone's expectations are at times askance. How could it be that our Father, Who gave His own Son to satisfy the payment for our sins, could meet with ANYONE's unsatisfied expectation?! One more story – and you know it well.

It was probably a long walk, not because of the length of the road but the long 'faces'. The two travelers to Emmaus were initially upset with the 'outsider' who apparently didn't know why they were dismayed. But as He toured them through the scripture pointing to one picture after another concerning Christ, their hearts burned. The smoldering embers of faith were rekindled so to speak. And then, when He broke the bread, their vision cleared. Their spiritual myopia was healed and Christ came into focus.

The broken bread – His broken body. We MUST remember what that means; what it means to us eternally.

You see, "expectation" in Hebrew has an interesting second meaning – a "cord". And as you consider the principle of first mention in the scripture, that is, the first place a significant prophetic picture or word is presented in scripture often reveals additional insight, this cord

speaks of the broken bread and of the Tree. You see, it is the scarlet cord that Rahab had to keep in her window to save her when the Israelites conquered Jericho. That scarlet cord represents the living hope we MUST keep in our 'window' -- visible, in focus. ***We must keep it there especially when the walls are crumbling around us.*** It's not just a protection against judgment which we indeed deserve but a reminder of a divine promise of salvation.

Our expectations are usually just too small, too carnal, too myopic. When Christ broke the bread – when the wood was placed in the water – when the scarlet cord was kept in the window – they are illustrations of when we re-establish faith in our Lord and Savior who's plans far, far out pace our own, who's eternal kingdom includes resurrections, restorations, transformations and inspirations way beyond our imaginations!

Give God your shattered expectations, dashed hopes, bitter heart. Tune the 'dial' once again to His Holy Spirit's voice so that your hope may be alive, your expectation from Him, your anticipation joyful, peaceful and confident. Your heart will heal. You will find God worthy of your love and trust.

Keep the cross, the broken body and the precious blood of our Savior before you at all times.

One day soon, our Abba will send His Son and you'll see that indeed He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. He'll FAR exceed our expectations.