

Great Expectations

Happy Independence Day to all. Thank God for the freedom we enjoy as Americans to live and worship and gather and protest and express ourselves as we choose. We realize the maintaining of such freedom comes at a cost and we honor the brave men and women who have served or are now serving our country in the armed forces. I know the choir song recognized you this morning, but one more time could we ask all of our veterans and our active or reserve members of the armed forces of the United States to stand and let us show our thanks and appreciation to you. God bless you and your families. Thank you for your service.

Often on this weekend I have taken the opportunity to talk about freedom from a biblical and spiritual perspective. As believers and followers of Christ, I believe we know what true freedom is. Jesus said, “whom the Son sets free is free indeed.” Through Jesus Christ and his saving grace and mercy we have been set free from the burden of sin and bondage to sin. We have been set free to make wise choices, redeemed choices. Our sins are forgiven, guilt and shame is taken away and we are free. Thanks be to God for that freedom. With that said, I felt drawn to something different today. I don’t know that I have much of a sermon, but I feel I have a word for the church today.

At the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, he went to the synagogue in the little town of Nazareth where he had been brought up. Perhaps as a rabbi visiting his hometown, he is asked to be the guest speaker that day and was asked to read the Scripture of the week. According to Luke, here is what happened. **“The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was hand to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, ‘Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’” Luke 4:17-21**

This passage from Isaiah 61 was considered by the people to be a Messianic passage, i.e. it was speaking of and pointing to the coming Messiah. They lived in expectation of the Messiah’s coming. They were praying for it. They believed the Messiah would be a descendant of King David, a Son of David. They believed he would be a righteous leader especially anointed by God to deliver them from their oppressors and usher in a new age of God’s blessing

and favor. They knew this passage by heart. In fact, Luke only records a portion of the passage from Isaiah because they all knew it so well. It was a bold claim then when Jesus read those words and said to the people, “today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” He was saying this announces the coming of God’s new kingdom, the initiation of his new covenant.

Interestingly, one of the signs of the coming of the Messiah to which Jesus referred as he read from Isaiah would be the recovery of sight to the blind. This wasn’t the only passage where Isaiah referred to this. Speaking of the day when the Messiah would come, the prophet said, **“In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.” Isaiah 29:18** Again referring to the coming of the Messiah, a few chapters later he declared, **“Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy.” Isaiah 35:5-6.** Once again, **“I will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.” Isaiah 42:6-7**

The promise is replayed that the blind will see. Of all the miracles recorded in the Old Testament, there is no record of a blind person being healed. There were all kinds of miracles, even the dead raised to life, but no blindness healed. But when Jesus came, it was one of his most frequent miracles. It was a distinct sign to the people that Jesus was in fact the Messiah.

Look at Matthew 12. The bible says, **“Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, ‘Could this be the Son of David?’” Matthew 12:22-23 .** The restoring of sight to the blind man caused them to ask a very specific question. “Could this be the Son of David.” Son of David was a Messianic term for the people. They were putting the pieces together. Could this be the Messiah the prophets spoke of, the Son of David, because this guy is healing the blind, one of the signs of the coming of God’s Messianic kingdom.

I’m going somewhere with all of this, but turn back to Matthew 11. John the Baptist had been sure that Jesus was the Messiah. On one occasion he saw Jesus and said, **“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29** John the Baptist knew who Jesus was. But then John gets arrested and imprisoned by Herod Antipas (also known as Herod Antipatros or Antipater; brother to H.Philip and H.Archelaus). Held for some time before being beheaded, John begins to wonder if Jesus is the Messiah after all. Obviously things weren’t

turning out so well for John. John must have had certain expectations of what the Messiah would or should be doing. Look what the bible says. **“When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, ‘Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’” Matthew 11:2-3**

Perhaps John was expecting different results, more results. John expected a sweeping spiritual renewal of the Jewish community but that wasn't happening. He expected the priesthood to be cleaned up because the High Priest at that time was essentially a political appointee, unfit to serve as high priest. John had an expectation and Jesus' actions and teaching and his timing didn't exactly meet John's expectations. Maybe he just hoped Jesus would get him out of prison and that hadn't happened. Are you the one, or should we expect someone else?

What is your expectation of Jesus? We expect him to answer all of our prayers (of course we don't expect to live for him and make him the Lord of our lives.) We don't expect him to expect anything of us, do we? We expect him to solve our problems but we didn't expect him to insist we take up a cross and follow him. What is your expectation of Jesus? What can you expect of him?

The truth is, you can expect him to be what and who the bible says he is. You can expect him to be the Savior, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. You can expect him to be the anointed one that comes to preach good news to the poor, to the outcast and the hopeless. You can expect him to proclaim freedom for prisoners and those held in bondage by sin and darkness. You can expect him to release the oppressed and those bowed down, to bring sight to the blind and to announce the year of the Lord's favor. But don't expect him to be a pushover. Don't expect him to be Santa Claus. Don't expect him to ignore your sin or to leave you as he found you, lost and broken.

Jesus told John's disciples, **“Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.” Matthew 11:4-6**

Go back and tell John what the bible said would happen is happening. I love that Jesus then said, blessed is the man who doesn't fall away on account of me. Jesus wasn't worried about measuring up to John's expectations nor is he worried about measuring up to ours. He was just concerned with obeying the father and doing everything the Father asked him to do. If Jesus

isn't acting like you think he ought to act, guess who needs to adjust their expectation? We need to make sure our expectation matches up with what the bible says about who Jesus is and what he has come to do. Blessed is the person who takes Jesus as he is. With that in mind, turn back once again to Matthew 9.

Jesus is now in the area of his new hometown of Capernaum, on the Northern edge of the Sea of Galilee. The bible says, **“As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, ‘Have mercy on us, Son of David!’ When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him and he asked them, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ they replied. Then he touched their eyes and said, ‘According to your faith will it be done to you’; and their sight was restored.” Matthew 9:27-30**

We've already discussed the significance of that phrase they used, “Son of David.” By calling Jesus “Son of David” I believe it indicates these two men had settled it in their hearts and minds that Jesus was the Messiah. They believed he was ushering in the Messianic reign of which the prophets spoke. That means they believed those Scriptures we read at the beginning applied to Jesus and what he had come to do. Why is that significant for them or for us? Because, **What you believe about Jesus will determine what you expect from Jesus.**

They believed what Isaiah said, that they could expect their sight to be restored. They believed there was good news for them, even though they were poor and there wasn't much in the way of good news for the poor in first century Galilee. They believed there was freedom and release coming for them. They believed they would experience the Lord's blessing and favor. What they believed about Jesus determined what they could expect. They expected the Lord to be merciful and that expectation led them to cry out to him, to follow him, to boldly walk right into the house where Jesus was. What they believed about Jesus caused them to believe he wouldn't turn them away; he wouldn't rebuke them for following him into the house. What they believed about Jesus led them to believe he was good and powerful and was able to restore their sight. ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ ‘Yes, Lord.’

I believe that “Yes Lord” was their way of saying “Yes, we believe you are the Messiah. Yes, we believe you have good news for us. Yes, we believe you can do all things. Yes, we believe God has sent you to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Yes, you have mercy for us. Yes, Lord, we believe.” What you believe about Jesus determines what you expect from Jesus.

If you look at the rest of the passage from Isaiah that Jesus read in the synagogue that day in Nazareth, here is what you'll find. Here is what the two blind men believed about Jesus and the Messianic kingdom. He had come to **Preach good news to the poor. Heal the brokenhearted. Proclaim freedom to those held captive. Release for those imprisoned in darkness. Recovery of sight for the blind. Proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Comfort all who mourn. Provide for those who grieve. Exchange beauty for ashes. Exchange the oil of joy for mourning. Exchange a garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness and despair.**

They believed Jesus was the Messiah and that he had come to do these very things. What they believed determined what they expected. I believe Jesus is calling us to raise our expectations this morning. What do you believe? I believe Jesus is still doing these things and I believe Jesus calls us as a church to proclaim and announce these same things. He intends us to reach the hurting and the broken, the blind, those in prison, the hungry, the rich, the poor, the young, the old, those who have everything but don't have Jesus, those who feel hopeless and have given up. I believe Jesus is still speaking to people and still reaching out to people and because I believe that, it changes my expectation of what he will do and my expectation of what we as his church are called to do. What about you?

What do you believe about Jesus? What are you expecting from Jesus? To the two blind men Jesus asks, "Do you believe I am able to do this?" In other words, "what do you expect from me?" I'm thinking we may need to raise our expectations this morning. It's time for greater expectations. Because of what we believe about Jesus, about his power and his mercy and his grace and about his faithfulness and his goodness and his power to heal and about his very nature to love and to give and to serve, I want to raise my expectations.

Jesus said to the two men, "According to your faith it will be done to you" and their sight was restored. It's interesting to me, they never asked Jesus for healing, they asked for mercy. Jesus never asked them what it was they wanted. He just asked about their expectation, their belief. "Do you believe I am able to do this?" We assume it was all about the blindness and receiving their sight, but I wonder if it was about more than that. I wonder if he had mercy upon them and healing their eyes was just the outward, external part we could see. I wonder what else they were expecting? I wonder what else they were believing for that was changed and restored by his mercy? "Have mercy on us" and Jesus gave them mercy. His mercy brought them into

the kingdom where there is healing and forgiveness and new life. It wasn't just their physical sight that was restored that day.

What do you believe about Jesus? Do you believe he is able to show you mercy today? What are you expecting? I'm expecting the Lord to act according to his mercy. Do I have enough faith because Jesus said, "according to your faith will it be done to you." I've got faith to believe that Jesus is who he says he is. I've got faith to believe he has the power to do all things. I believe he is the Son of God, Savior, Healer, Redeemer and Lord and what I believe about him effects what I expect from him. I'm telling you I expect him to show mercy to me and to show that mercy to you as well. I expect him to help us and deliver us. I am expecting him to answer prayer. I'm expecting him to change your circumstances, your outlook. For some of you who mourn, I am expecting him to speak a word of hope, a word of encouragement, a word of comfort. I am expecting him to step into the nightmare of your circumstances and deliver you and turn things around. I'm expecting beauty for ashes, joy for grief. A garment of praise for depression and despair. According to your faith, according to your belief, according to your expectation, I believe it is going to be done for you because he is going to respond to your cry for mercy with mercy!

I am expecting to see manifestations and evidence of God's mercy at work in your life, in your family, in our church, in our services. What are you expecting? Listen, the Lord has stirred my heart this week. I think I felt a little like John the Baptist, wondering what I should expect and I've heard the Lord saying to me to raise my expectation. "You still believe don't you Phil?" Yes, sir. Then what you believe about me determines what you can expect. I believe he is the same yesterday, today and forever. That's what the bible says. Then I expect God to be God at CAG. I expect God to be God in our church, in our community and in our lives. I expect the miraculous to happen because he said he was going to confirm his word with signs following his word. What are you expecting? It's time for Great Expectations because we serve a Great God. Let your expectation and your faith rise to the level of the Great God you serve! I'm expecting the Lord of mercy to be merciful. Why don't you ask for his mercy today?

(Church, I'm asking specifically, what do you expect God to do through CAG? What is your expectation of what the Lord wants to do in this church? In our services? In this community through this church? Let's raise our expectation because we know how merciful and good our God is!)

