

# Great Expectations

A Sermon by Rev. Derek Elphick

*"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword...." (Matthew 10:34).*

## INTRODUCTION

When it comes to reading stories and accounts from the Word...

- we can easily assume it's all been sorted out
  - all of the characters fall in line
    - everyone understands what's going on
    - everyone understands what is being asked of them
    - lesson learned
    - end of story, next chapter

But that's not really how the text of the Word unfolds...

Take the 12 disciples, the Lord's closest followers, by way of example:

- there were many things they misunderstood or just didn't "get" when the Lord taught them about the Kingdom of Heaven
  - they got the proverbial "wrong end of the stick" many times:
    - *"But the disciples did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask [Jesus]..." (Mark 9:32).*
    - *"But the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them..." (Luke 18:34)*
    - *"These things His disciples did not understand at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered..." (John 12:6).*

Or,

- think of when Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father. Jesus responds by saying: *"Have I been with you so long, and yet you have*

*not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father?'" (John 14:9).*

Now, before we settle too comfortably into our seats thinking we wouldn't misunderstand things like the disciples, let me invite you to think again.

## **CONSTANT ADJUSTMENT**

- Isn't it fair to say that we *all* find ourselves needing to adjust the way we view things?
- It would be quite arrogant to claim we have "perfect clarity" on anything! ...no matter what our area of expertise might be!

Wouldn't it be more accurate to say our understanding of how things work is a series of...

- tweaks
- adjustments
- revisions
- moments of "*I thought this, but now I'm beginning to see I might be wrong...*"

**In other words, we expect things to be one way but then discover something different!**

Now, we might think that waking up one day with "*perfect clarity*" on all things would solve our problems...

- Wouldn't it lead to perfect peace & happiness?
- Wouldn't it be nice knowing *exactly* what to expect each day, in all situations?
- Truthfully, it wouldn't be nice.
- It would actually rob us of what makes us truly human.

- Uncertainty, as much as we dislike it and fight against it, is what leaves us in freedom to make good choices

- choices that we can stand behind because we've wrestled with issues of right & wrong, wrestled w/what it is we really want in life.

More importantly, when it comes to our own regeneration, we really shouldn't

- be left to our own devices  
- because what we "think" will make us peaceful and happy or what we "think" we know is, quite often, misinformed or misguided

So perhaps we aren't that different from the 12 disciples after all...

Perhaps there are things we don't understand...

- perhaps there are times when we get the wrong end of the stick!

## **EXPECTATIONS**

Well, this brings us to topic of today's sermon, expectations.

Our lives are built upon expectations.

Thousands of factors shape peoples' expectations:

- their upbringing  
- how they've been treated by others  
- life-changing events (particularly ones beyond their control - loss of a loved one or chronic illness)

People expect certain things based on...

- what they've been taught  
- the values and norms of society.

As a result, we have all sorts of expectations

- realistic & unrealistic

- fair & unfair
- reasonable & unreasonable
  - of ourselves
  - of others
  - and the expectations others place on us.

The Lord has gifted us with the capacity to "project" whatever kind of future we desire.

- It's what makes us human
- And it is the Lord who plants these hopes and dreams in us (ideals)
- The expectation of...
  - *of a happy marriage*
  - *raising happy children who become useful contributors to society*
  - *a fulfilling job*
  - *healthy relationships with family and friends*
  - *a life of purpose and use*
  - *a happy retirement*

But we also know from experience (sometimes bitter experience) that our hopes and dreams don't always materialize in the way we envisioned.

- there's "hope" and "reality" traveling along on...
  - two *seemingly* separate, independent tracks.
- and sometimes, rather than successfully meeting our expectations, we find ourselves...
  - lowering them
  - or compromising
  - or abandoning them altogether!

So it's not unusual to harbor bitter, cynical thoughts when things don't go the way we expect.

**A QUESTION: ARE WE GOOD "INTERPRETERS" OF WHAT'S GOING ON (inside us and around us)?**

We all have high ideals, a sense of how things "should" be.

So how do we hold onto our hopes and dreams (our ideals) in the midst of setback and disappointment?

One thing we can do is make sure we are *interpreting* our circumstances correctly.

**And we will need the Lord's Word as our measuring stick...**

You see, we're not always the best judges of "success," especially if we use the standards of the world as our yardstick.

There are so many inspirational stories out there....

- of *people overcoming tremendous odds*
- *have one thing in common:*

*they make the correct interpretation about their situation: they view their "setback" (no matter how severe or extreme that might be) as an opportunity*

- *an opportunity to learn, grow, shift their perspective*

*e.g. Ann Frank, Victor Frankl, Helen Keller*

In our reading from *Secrets of Heaven* today, we learned about the striking statement that "evil and falsity" is much more NOTICEABLE to us, LOUDER if you will, than what the Lord is doing inside us to move us toward happier things.

"For every falsity the hells inject, *there is a response from the Divine...*"

[PAUSE - every time something bad, hurtful or sad befalls us, there is a response from the Lord]

"We are less conscious of the response from the Divine than we are of the falsities..."

Ends by saying:

"The Lord's response does not touch our individual thoughts, only our general awareness, *yet in such a way that we barely notice it except in the form of hope and comfort, which, however, holds within it countless blessings that we have no knowledge of...*" (AC 8159).

**Point? - we are not alone. The Lord is with us in ways we don't expect.**

### **LETTING THE LORD RE-ADJUST OUR EXPECTATIONS**

The work of re-birth, regeneration, is essentially the process of...

- tackling false assumptions
- not buying into the lies of the hells (negative chatter in our mind)
- not being fooled by the appearances of this world.

**Put another way, the work of re-birth, regeneration, is essentially the process of letting the Lord re-adjust our expectations...**

- asking the Lord to re-align our hopes and dreams...

### **3 FALSE EXPECTATIONS:**

**False Expectation #1 - That we should be perfect**

*"There is never a point in time (in this world or the next) when a person can say, 'Now I am perfect...' (AC 894)*

**\*\*Yes, the Lord says, "Be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48) but the Greek word for perfect (Telios) means "whole," meaning, let your effort be whole, full, complete.**

- Intellectually, we know we can't be perfect, but it doesn't stop us from *demanding* perfection in ourselves and others!

This is a damaging expectation because no one is ever "good enough"

- don't meet our standards
- a disappointment
- never satisfied

## **False Expectation #2 - That we shouldn't have to experience pain/suffering**

The Lord said, *"In the world you will have affliction, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world..."* (John 16:33).

Our body is wired to avoid pain.

And much of the media "messaging" in this world contains products and services that promise to remove your discomfort and pain...

In today's text - *"Do not think I came into the world to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword..."*

- of course, the Lord does bring peace, true peace, heaven's peace
- but He was saying, don't expect life to be free of conflict, don't expect there to be peace without conflict, without having to use the sword of truth to battle against evil & falsity

## **False Expectation #3 - We won't succeed, expect to fail**

- these lies from the hells are directed at us, not the world at large
- the lies of the hells are deeply personal - the wording of the Writings is they "*attack*" "*accuse*" and "*condemn*" us
- negative chatter in our mind (bullies in our head) constantly cutting us down, drowning out the still, small voice of the Lord

#### **False Expectation #4 -The world will bring us peace & happiness**

*"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you...." (John 14:27).*

The Lord's peace rests in living His commandments, doing the right thing, reaching out in love and kindness.

*"If only you had known the things that make for your peace...but now they are hidden from your eyes..." (Luke 19:42).*

Our natural mind, in looking for peace from the world, nevertheless ends up placing *"peace in annoyances..."* (AC 5662).

#### **False Expectation # 5 - That we should expect instant results**

e.g. Social Media - immediate expectation is you should be "amazing," "make an impact!" If not, something wrong with you.

So..."if it's not working - throw it out!"

- no concept of delayed gratification, working hard toward a noble goal

Patience...

*"The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree..." (Mt. 13:31).*

#### **THE LORD'S WORD RE-ALIGNS AND RESTORES OUR EXPECTATIONS**

The Lord in His Word has a wonderful way of shifting our perspective, of re-aligning and restoring our expectations.

The Word often begins with a statement or scenario or event which takes people by surprise



- He who is first will be last/turn the other cheek/go the extra mile/love your enemies, etc.

At first glance, it doesn't make sense...

It's not what we expect but then the Lord teaches us something different, something deeper and more profound...

These "surprises" in the Word are a welcome reprieve

- just what we need to hear
- an invitation to shift our perspective
- realize that we don't have to abandon our hopes and dreams
  - more a matter of adjusting our expectations
  - seeing things from the perspective of heaven

May we ever more confidently align ourselves with the Lord's hopes and dreams for *"those who allow themselves to be cheered by hope remain steadfast in an affirmative outlook"* (AC 2338).

**AMEN.**