

Advent Expectations
Luke 7:18-28
Third Sunday in Advent
December 16, 2018

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, And when the men had come to him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We all know the frustrations of unmet expectations. We expect someone to do his homework, to pay rent on time, to follow through with his plans, to mean it when they say “I do.” You know how your blood boils when a delivery company gives itself a four-hour window to drop off your new appliance, then calls *after* the window has passed to tell you they’re running late! And, yes, how fitting – though coincidental – that we have such a visual aid before us today... we were given the expectation the chancel floor would be done for our use today; instead, here we are.

But, something happens in our sin-laden world when dealing with unmet expectations... we begin to deal with it so often and it starts to become so commonplace that we begin to assume that expectations aren’t really supposed to be met... that you can say whatever you want to set an expectation, come in with something slightly less, and then – if someone still has that expectation – it’s their fault for expecting too much.

- “Why would you expect me to deliver your appliance on time? – everyone knows it’s industry standard to run behind schedule.”
- “Why would you expect me to do my homework? – everyone knows teenagers are testing the waters of rebellion and can’t *really* be expected to be studious?”
- “Why would you expect me to actually *mean* ‘til death us do part’? Don’t you know 40-50% of all marriages end in divorce, and somehow, almost all of those are ‘no fault divorce’?”
- “Why would you expect me to pay rent faithfully? – everyone knows that, if you have a tear-filled story about how tough the last month has been, the landlord owes you patience.”

But, here’s the problem with all of that: proper expectations are not built out of thin air, as if the one who has those expectations is at fault for having them; they’re built on *promises*... and they carry with them the authority of the person’s word and trust: “I will be a son or daughter who honors my parent’s wishes about schooling.” “I will pay my monthly rent on time;” “I will have the appliance to you between 8 and 12.” “I will pledge thee my love and faithfulness in every duty, not to part from thee, ‘til death us do part.” If one will not meet the expectations *he* has established, why should I trust his word?

The same is true for our God, isn't it? That sometimes people think we can dumb-down and soften the sharp points of doctrine because we ought not expect God's Word to be kept in every detail. "Oh yes, God *said* these things, but – c'mon on – we all know expectations aren't actually met."

But the Scriptures say, "Let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no.'" We may excuse away our sin and unkept expectations by saying such is too high a bar for sinners, but John the Baptist knows that's exactly the bar that God Himself set for his own Word of promise regarding the Messiah. If God set the expectation, He *better* deliver on it.

And so, here John sits in prison, and – whether we want to get into his head and say he's doubting... or whether we want to reason that he's using the opportunity to teach his disciples – what ultimately matters is that he's holding God at His Word. That's not sinful or expecting too much; it's faith and trust. God promised a Messiah. He promised a Coming One to come with signs and wonders. He promised One who was going to reconcile God and Man; he *better* deliver on that promise.

And so, the question is posed to Jesus: 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?' 'Should our expectations be calmed by you, or are we still waiting?'

Notice, that's not necessarily a question of sinful doubt. It's a question put forth by one who is willing to take God at His Word:

“God, You promised this. Don’t let me down! Is there another one coming, or is this the One whom we seek?”

And notice how Jesus answers John’s messengers: “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard.” *Why?* Because God had set expectations of what they would see and hear when the Messiah came... and if those sights and sounds haven’t been realized, Jesus is not the one. But, if the expectations **are** met, *then* – even languishing in prison – any and every Christian can have comfort.

And, so, Jesus points them right to the evidence and whether the evidence matches Scriptural expectations. For expectations based on Scripture are expectations properly built on the Word and promise of the Giver. So, Jesus goes to the evidence and asks the messengers to compare it to the expectation rightly set on Scripture:

“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.”

Wasn’t that the expectation set, the expectation to be met and fulfilled in the coming Christ? How do we know this but because God sent the prophets *to set the expectations!* How often do we hear them declare, “Thus saith the Lord” ... here are the expectations He wants you to have... He *insists* that you have, so that when he fulfills them, You know His Word is pure and true. And so, through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, the Lord sets expectations: “In that

day the **deaf** shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the **blind** shall see” and again, “Then the eyes of the **blind** shall be opened, and the ears of the **deaf** unstopped; then shall the **lame** man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the **mute** sing for joy” and again, “The Lord has anointed me to bring **good news to the poor**; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.”

Those were the expectations God himself set. Those were his promises, his markers of trustworthiness, so that you could know that – when these things began to take place – the Messiah was coming. And so, that’s directly where Jesus appeals when the disciples of John ask for evidence to meet their expectations: “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard.” It’s almost as if saying, “Go and tell everyone what you have seen and heard: the appliance is delivered on time, the homework is done, the marriage vows intact, the rent owed has been paid.”

Jesus defends his own credibility and fills John’s disciples with joy by appealing to the certain trustworthiness of God’s expectations – *He* made them; now, *He* keeps them.

As an aside, by the way, notice what that says about the notion of faith healings and miracle healings in our day... the expectation was never set by God that the healing miracles of Jesus were to be an end unto themselves... they were signs of met

expectations. Moreover, God never promised that the death and resurrection of Jesus would mean immediate miraculous healings for the faithful from all ills and afflictions. Rather, the expectations *He* set regarding the death and resurrection of Christ is that – in this world – followers would share in his death, not only by experience in this world, but – far more importantly – by hiding in the merit of his blood and righteousness. And, if we share in his death, then – the expectation is set – we will share in his resurrection.

“Do you not know” the apostle rhetorically asks, “that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his *death*?... For if we have been united with him in a *death* like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a *resurrection* like his.”

That's the expectation *God* sets... so that the healing miracles of Jesus simply speak to his divinity, not to your daily life's expectation of how God will get you out of the hospital. Does he hear our prayers and heal us temporally in accord with his eternal will? Absolutely! But, does that make images of divine and miraculous healing for *all* the expectation set by the coming Christ? Not remotely! (In fact, even John himself – after being told that Christ was on the scene setting at liberty the oppressed – John himself remained in prison *until death*!) Rather, the healing of those days pointed to God keeping His promises and the oath he swore to father Abraham – the Messiah was on the scene, and the faithful would know it through these signs and wonders.

And if Jesus fulfills *those* expectations of His *coming*, won't He also fulfill divine expectations of his *redeeming* and his *servicing*? On the cross, he fulfilled every prophecy, every expectation – down to saying “I thirst” to fulfill the Scriptures. In new life, our high priest comes to serve just as He promised – “This is my body; this is my blood” – so that when you wonder and doubt whether the Lord meets the expectations He has given you, He can faithfully answer, “Go tell everyone what you have seen and heard – ‘This is the Word of the Lord’, and again, ‘This is my body, this is my blood’ – so that, whether they recognize it or not, your ears have heard and your eyes have seen my salvation, which I have prepared before the face of all people.”

Indeed, how certain can we be of the promises of Christ because he builds them on divinely set expectations, and then *keeps* them. This is why Jesus spends the last third of our text defending *John's* reputation and John's preaching... Think of Jesus' rhetorical questions and how they build on those expectations.

- He asks, “What did you go out to see? A reed shaken in the wind?” It's as if he asks, ‘Do you expect preaching that will change course and backpedal on promises and expectations? That's not the preaching of the messenger of God – for he has all strength and backbone provided from my certain promises.’

- Again, Jesus asks, “What did you go to see? A man in soft (fine, rich) clothing?” It’s as if he asks, ‘Do you expect a preacher who will preach to be loved and adorned with wealth? ...preaching that will alter expectations to match whatever *you* want so that you will lavish with praise? That’s not John!’
- ‘And even,’ Jesus says, ‘even if you went to see a prophet, your expectations were still not in keeping with the expectations *God* set, for God said, “Behold, my messenger before [the Messiah’s] face, who will prepare [the Messiah’s] way before [him].” How resolute was Jesus in sticking to the divinely set expectations! Consider John’s place in divine expectations and how, no matter, if the people believed him, he fulfilled those expectations and pointed us to the Christ.

And yet, Jesus says, the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than John. In other words, as you and I can build on and put our hope in the foundation built by the Lord’s messenger and the Lord’s Christ, then we have a far greater fortress of certainty. With God, prophecies proclaimed are prophecies fulfilled; messengers promised are messengers sent; expectations set are expectations met.

With sinful man, expectations set are often not expectations met. With sinful man, expectations set are often promises broken

that need to be met with a call to repentance, and then with even more patience and forgiveness and sympathy for the penitent, as he seeks help to rebuild the strength of his word which his unmet expectations and broken promises have so quickly eroded and rendered untrustworthy.

Not so with God, whose Word is perfect and pure and trustworthy... who – when He promises to send a Messiah to die the sinner’s death and pay the sinner’s ransom and be the sinner’s intercessor and high priest – He goes to such great lengths to meet those expectations and keep His promises that He willingly empties himself of all visible glory, becomes man, goes to the cross, and (risen again) comes to the font, pulpit, and altar. St. Paul says it this way, “This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Or, perhaps a more seasonable quote that comes to mind, “He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old... to remember his holy covenant.”

In the Name of the Father
 And of the Son
 And of the Holy Spirit.
 + AMEN +

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