

# Expectations: Real and Unreal

by Richard E. Bieber

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of having realistic expectations, based on God's Word, rather than being swayed by the world's promises of success and fulfillment.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 3:1, Psalm 107:9, Matthew 10:16, Matthew 16:24, Luke 15:25, Luke 18:31, John 12:24, Philippians 3:18, 1 John 3:16

**Topics:** "Realistic Expectations", "Godly Fulfillment"

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## Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches on the importance of having realistic expectations in life, drawing from the example of Jesus riding into Jerusalem amidst praises but not being carried away by apparent success. He emphasizes the need to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves, focusing on the real goal rather than unreal expectations inspired by lies. By highlighting the consequences of false hopes through biblical examples like Amnon, the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son, and King Saul, he urges listeners to find true fulfillment in God and the cross, which leads to joy, deliverance from self-pity, healing of bitterness, and ultimately, heaven.

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## Transcript

When we picture Jesus riding the donkey down into Jerusalem surrounded by praises and blessings and hosannas -- this apparent moment of triumph when it seems that Jesus' years of patience are beginning to pay off -- we need to view the whole scene against the background of Jesus' word to the twelve when he first sent them forth: "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves...."

Matthew 10:16

Now Jesus Himself is a sheep in the midst of wolves - a Lamb

surrounded by the ones who are going to slaughter Him.

So while Jesus accepts their acclaim He does not allow Himself to be carried away with all this apparent success.

At no point does Jesus pin His hopes on these people.

- He is wise as a serpent.

Nor does Jesus take advantage of their enthusiasm and start manipulating the crowds for His own ends, as modern evangelists are forever doing.

- He is innocent as a dove.

There is a lesson in this that we all need to learn, because there are moments in our lives when we are tempted to believe that big things are just around the corner for us. If we fail to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves we invariably get sucked up with unreal expectations - expectations that are inspired by a lie and that take us far from God. How Jesus' expectations could have soared that day if He had pinned them on this joyful crowd!

... if He had seen success in their terms and allowed His mind to be inflamed with this apparent victory.

Instead Jesus, wise as a serpent, innocent as a dove, keeps His heart fixed upon the real goal.

"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished.

For he will be delivered to the Gentiles,

and will be mocked and shamefully treated  
and spit upon; they will scourge him and kill  
him, and on the third day he will rise."

Luke 18:31-33

- that's what Jesus expects!

A few days later when things start going bad, the disciples  
fall apart. But Jesus keeps right on going  
because His expectations are based on reality. He's  
not on some success trip ... but on His way to a cross.  
When Jesus describes Satan as the father of lies what  
does this mean but that Satan inspires in our minds  
unreal expectations.

... he said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You  
shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?"

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may  
eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden;

but God said, 'You shall not eat of the  
fruit of the tree which is in the midst of  
the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest  
you die.'" But the serpent said to the

woman, "You will not die. For God knows that  
when you eat of it your eyes will be opened,  
and you will be like God, knowing good and evil,"

So when the woman saw that the tree was good  
for food, and that it was a delight to the  
eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to  
make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate;

and she also gave some to her husband, and

he ate. Genesis 3:1-6

So Eve pins her hope on something that will never be. She eats the fruit and gives some to her husband and disaster follows.

Every downfall that we've experienced in our lives began with false expectations. Instead of being wise as serpents and innocent as doves we allowed ourselves to be lured into expecting our fulfillment to come from another hand than God's.

- "When I achieve success I will be fulfilled."

- "When I make it in my profession I will be fulfilled."

- "When I marry this woman, this man, I will be fulfilled."

- "When I finally own my dream house I will be fulfilled."

- "If I have an affair with so-and-so I will be fulfilled."

- "If I have that drink, or take those-pills, I will be fulfilled."

God knows the obsessions that consume our minds while we go about our business looking quite normal ... and every one of them is unreal!

Suppose we achieve the coveted goal,

we accumulate our million,

we have the affair,

we get good and drunk,

... we got what we wanted so badly. Now what?

Four inevitable fruits follow:

The first is disappointment.

Now Absalom, David's son, had a beautiful

sister, whose name was Tamar; and after a time Amnon, David's son, loved her. And Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar; for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her. But Amnon had a friend whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's brother; and Jonadab was a very crafty man. And he said to him, "O son of the king, why are you so haggard morning after morning? Will you not tell me?" Amnon said to him, "I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister." Jonadab said to him, "Lie down on your bed, and pretend to be ill; and when your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Let my sister Tamar come, and give me bread to eat, and prepare the food in my sight, that I may see it, and eat it from her hand.'" So Amnon lay down, and pretended to be ill; ....But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister." She answered him, "No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this wanton folly. As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the wanton fools in Israel. Now

therefore, I pray you, speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you." But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she, he forced her, and lay with her.

Then Amnon hated her with very great hatred; so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, "Arise, be gone."

II Samuel 13:1-15

Amnon's expectation was unreal. It was sick. It was all in his head. When he gets what he thinks he wants he's bitterly disappointed.

Some of us labor for years to achieve a goal we think will fulfill our lives apart from God, and when it comes, oh the disappointment!

Wrecked marriages - because the man and woman expected a fulfillment from each other no human can ever give.

Devastated minds - because people expected a fulfillment out of their work or their career that was utterly unreal.

The next fruit of unreal expectations is self-pity....

"Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your

father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!'"

Luke 15:25-30

The older brother had pinned his expectations on his own righteousness. He had no conception of the father's mercy. What a disappointment when he sees mercy welcoming his wayward brother ... mercy that was waiting for him all these years. Now self-pity sets in.

"I did all these things for you. You never gave me a goat to celebrate with my friends."

How we can wallow in it! Some of us have been doing it for years and we don't even realize it!

The next fruit of unreal expectations is bitterness.

King Saul followed his own way and lost his anointing as king, disappointment and self-pity gave way to a long season of bitterness. He was bitter toward David, bitter toward his own son, bitter toward his people.

His attitude was sour and morose because his heart had

long since forgotten to find its fulfillment in the God  
of Israel.

We have tasted what it's like when the aroma of peace  
is gone, along with all kindness and mercy ... nothing  
left but smoldering bitterness which is the prelude to  
the final fruit: hell itself - separation from God.

Such is the journey of the soul that pursues its satisfaction  
in the unreal, in anything apart from God,  
whether it be money,  
romance,  
religious fame,  
or kinky pleasures. The end is always the  
same - disappointment,  
self-pity,  
bitterness,  
hell.

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst  
of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent  
as doves."

- Wise enough to keep your eye on the true goal....

- Pure enough never to compromise.

Jesus' goal was not the admiration of the crowd,  
or to conquer the Temple,  
or to take over the throne.

- He had come to Jerusalem to lay down his  
life.

His goal was a cross. So is yours,

so is mine!

Let's get it clear: the goal of following Jesus in this world is a cross. Don't let anyone mislead you into thinking it's "prosperity" or spiritual thrills. The cross that waits for us at the end, and sanctifies every moment of our lives along the way, is our only source of joy.

- It never disappoints us.
- It delivers us from self-pity.
- It heals our bitterness.
- It floods our lives with heaven.
- Our cross ... the cross Jesus bids us carry.

Let the rest of the world pursue "success" - whatever that means. And let "celebrity Christianity" chase after the crowds and make a name for itself before men. We have been sent as sheep in the midst of wolves to follow the Lamb of God to the cross ... to lay down our lives with Him at the time and place of His choosing.

"If any one would come after me let him deny himself take up his cross and follow me."

"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it remains alone. But if it dies it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." John 12:24-25

God help us get our eyes on the one real expectation He offers us in this world: a cross.

"By this we know love, that he laid down his  
life for us; and we ought to lay down our  
lives for the brethren." I John 3:16

There is a death waiting for us at the end of our road  
too. And on the way a thousand deaths to self. And from  
this death and these deaths we can expect, from God,  
rivers of divine mercy to flow.

Every time we lay down our life, spend ourself,  
lose ourself, give ourself,  
we taste the glory of God,  
we touch the throne of mercy,  
we know Jesus in the power of His resurrection, the  
fellowship of His suffering, and the likeness of His  
death.

Every time we lay down our lives for others we experience,  
instead of self-pity, overflowing thankfulness.

"O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good  
and his mercy endureth forever."

...and instead of bitterness, unspeakable joy  
...and instead of hell, heaven.

What are you expecting out of life? Some unreal success?

Or a cross?

If we have denied ourselves, taken up our cross, and are  
following Jesus we need to remember that we are sheep  
in the midst of wolves that seek to destroy us by luring  
us to expect fulfillment in the wrong place.

God help us to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

That with Jesus we may keep right on going past

- false success,

- false glory,

- false peace,

and not quit until we come to the place where we drink

the cup He drank and receive the baptism He was baptized

with ... faithful unto death, even death on a cross.

God help us to expect nothing less,

to settle for nothing less.

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