

Jesus Disrupts the Disciples' Expectations

by Stewart Ruch

The sermon explores how Jesus challenges societal expectations and encourages believers to seek God's will through prayer and alignment with His kingdom.

Duration: 22:51

Scripture: Genesis 1:28, Genesis 12:1-3, Joshua 1:1-2, Matthew 6:33, Mark 1:35-39

Topics: "Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the pressure and expectations that come with success. He shares his own experience as a young preacher, feeling the need to constantly deliver great sermons and meet the expectations of others. The preacher then turns to the Gospel of Mark, specifically focusing on verses 35-39. He highlights the human condition of living with great expectations and the pressure it can create. The sermon concludes by exploring how Jesus handles these expectations and offers a way to live by greater expectations.

Transcript

I will never forget a phone call that our family doctor once made to us. Catherine was pregnant with our fourth child. She was in her third trimester, and we at that point had a six-year-old, a four-year-old, and an almost two-year-old.

You could only imagine the incredible challenge. Indeed, at times, the trial that it was to carry this fourth child and have all these other children around you. Their needs, their hopes, their expectations always crowding in, and at the same time, the challenge of carrying this child.

And right at one of the more difficult weeks in that season, to our incredible shock, our doctor called us, and he said, Catherine, I've been thinking about you today, and I hope Stuart is giving you at least two hours a day to take a long nap. I hope you're being treated like the queen that you are. And he said, in all seriousness, don't forget, you're preparing to do one of the most important things that any human being can do.

You're bringing life to the world. The fact that our doctor would call us, the fact that he would call and say what he said, gave Catherine that strength, that perspective that she needed to carry on through those last difficult weeks. Indeed, it so influenced us, it so encouraged us, that in part, it was what gave us the strength and the calling from God to continue on and to have a fifth and a sixth child.

It had a massive influence on our life, that phone call. And that phone call almost didn't happen. Our doctor, his name is Dr. Peter Rosey, was a surgical student at the University of Chicago, so gifted that he graduated valedictorian of his surgery class.

Indeed, he was one of the finest medical minds of his generation. His advisors and everyone around him, because of his incredible academic success, expected him, understandably, to go into research. But he felt what he would later call a call from God, this compelling desire to go into family medicine, to practice obstetrics, to deliver babies for his life and his career.

When he went to his mentor, his advisor, to tell him of his decision, his advisor literally wept at what he perceived to be an incredible loss to the medical research community. Whose expectations guide your life? Others' expectations, perhaps even understandable ones like Peter Rosey's advisors, your own expectations, or God's? Here in the gospel, we are given a picture of Jesus, who is at this point in one of the first dynamics, a dynamic that will play out again and again and again throughout his ministry, where there are warring expectations on all sides of what he is supposed to do. Indeed, everyone has an expectation of Jesus.

Everyone has an expectation of this rabbi who teaches with an authority unlike anyone else. And indeed, it will get stronger and stronger and stronger. Indeed, he will so disrupt other people's expectations that ultimately it will, in significant part, lead to his execution and his death.

He is one who is caught in the vice grip of expectation and of what he is supposed to be doing. And yet we see Jesus and we can be given the power from Jesus to live a life not for others' expectations of what we're to be about or our own expectations of what we're to do, but Jesus is freed to live for the Father's expectations and to do the expectations of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of God alone. How? How does he live that life? How does he have that freedom? And how can we get that freedom from him? We'll look at the gospel together, so you can look at Mark.

I'm going to break this small passage. We'll look at the last verses of Mark there, verses 35 to 39. The first section is great expectations, verses 36 to 37, which really describes in many ways the human condition, what it is to live as a human being with the swell of expectations all around us.

Great expectations. And then verses 35 and 38 to 39, greater expectation. Now we read and read this morning that there were actually people lining up at the door of Simon or Peter.

It's the same name used for the same person. They're lining up at Simon's mother-in-law's house. What's happening is that people are beginning to understand who Jesus is.

He is a rabbi. They have a category for that. It was like an ancient Near Eastern teacher.

They would have schools of followers who would follow them to learn their teaching. This happened in the Hebraic culture, happened in the Greek culture. But this rabbi is actually doing things that other rabbis have not done.

He's actually able to lay hands on people and unclean spirits come out of them. If you're interested in how the Bible talks about demons, unclean spirits, I taught on this extensively last week. He's able to lay hands on people and when they have a fever, it goes away.

He teaches in a way that's so compelling, you don't want it ever to end. And when you know he's gonna begin teaching again the next day, you'll do everything you can to get to that teaching. Hundreds will become thousands upon thousands who are finding Jesus and wanting to hear from him.

They're literally lining up probably hundreds of them outside of this door. Jesus's ministry, his rabbinic school is seeing unparalleled success. The whole city has gathered.

And success always demands more success. Why is it that he gets up very early in the morning, verse 36, it's still dark, he departs. A lot of detail given to us by a writer, Mark, who gives you very little detail, because very likely he has to go to all these measures so that he can just get some time alone because everyone wants to be with him all the time.

His success breeds more success, breeds more success. Indeed, you can hear kind of the success avalanche starting in Simon's tone. Everyone is looking for you.

You have set into place expectations of your wonder and your amazing abilities. Success breeds success, breeds success. A business writer, David Allen, in the book Productivity, puts it this way.

The better you get, the better you better get. Isn't that a perfect way to describe how many, so many of us feel in the American life? The better you get, the better you better get. Success breeds success, breeds success.

Chugga, chugga, chugga, chugga, chugga, chugga, right? It's this massive locomotive train that's just moving down the tracks faster and faster and faster and faster. As a preacher, especially as a young preacher, I felt this all the time. I wouldn't wake up exhilarated on Monday morning from a great sermon where people told me that they loved it.

I'd wake up going, how do I do it again? And then again. And then again. I started doing the math and think, okay, if I preach to a certain age, how many more Sundays do I have to preach? How can I keep this up? Look at that railroad track with that locomotive just down the street.

It's going to kill me. As an athlete, as a runner, you run a great race, and you know, the two days later you should run a better race. You wanted a better time.

You wanted to beat your competitor by more than you did the time before. Success creates profound expectation. And if you've even had a little success, you've even had a little productivity or fruitfulness, perhaps you've known how that can begin to develop immense pressure.

The better you get, the better you better get. Underneath all of that, for me, for so many of us is this incredible terror. I'm going to disappoint those who have incredible expectations of me.

I'm going to profoundly disappoint others. Often expectations come from those who know us the best. Simon is likely one of those who is closest to Jesus.

So it's Simon who comes. Simon has been given entrance into Jesus's life. Simon, who knows him well enough to know, he probably snuck out early and went to a desolate place.

And I know his favorite desolate place outside Capernaum. That's the town that they're in. So I'll go there and find him.

Now, to be clear, there are expectations of those who know us, who are closest, that are good expectations. Parents can have right expectations of children. Professors can have right expectations of students.

Employers can have good expectations of employees. But often those who are closest to us can have expectations that are mixed up. Maybe some of it's good.

Maybe some of the expectations is built out of their own life and disappointments. And now they expect something of us that they themselves couldn't do. Maybe they're taking in expectations of the culture and they expect of us what the culture expects, as well as what they expect, as well as what they may want to expect.

It gets all mixed up and can grow in this kind of developing and stronger and stronger pressure. Catherine and I for several years, we worked closely with second-generation immigrants, most of the children of first-generation immigrants. Their parents had sacrificed immense amounts of money, time, energy, and have found a way to get them to university or college.

And we would work with these college students who were crushed by understandable parental expectation. Most of the students were Christians, and they didn't know how to work through the fog of these expectations and their parents thinking, you will do this profession. You will be successful in this way.

You will have this GPA. And they would say, how do I get through this? I mean, I want to honor my parents, but I'm stuck. And they would find that the only way, the only way through that crushing vice grip dynamic was to find some way in which they could hear the voice of God and live by God's call, yes, to honor their parents, but also to do what God had told them to do and to ultimately obey God more than others.

We'll talk more about that in just several minutes. Now, Jesus doesn't struggle with the next piece, but for many of us, it may not even be that those close to us or our own success is what creates this expectation weight. It's our own expectations.

Just generally, I think as Americans, we have extraordinarily high expectations of ourselves, everyone around us, and our conditions. As a historian, David Borstein, he said this about Americans. I think it's very insightful.

He says, we expect to eat and stay thin, to be constantly on the move and ever more neighborly, to go to a church of our choice and yet feel its guiding power over us, to revere God and to be God. Never have people been more than masters of their environment, yet never have people felt more deceived and disappointed. For never has a people, the American people, expected so much more than the world could offer.

Is it at all possible that the crush of expectation is generated by yourself more than anyone else? You expect to be perfect mother. There's a kind of specter ghost of what that perfect mother would be, should be, could be. Perfect father, perfect employee, perfect, well-rounded, absolute renaissance person who's an extreme in any way, gifted in about 17 different things, perfect Christian.

Or maybe you've said, you know what? I've observed this culture and it's a very high expectation culture and I refuse to play that game. So I will live by low expectations. Indeed, I will have such exceedingly low

expectations that I can't help but exceed them.

And when I exceed them, I'll give myself points for it. So I'm going to actually flip this whole system on its back and have very low expectations for my life and myself. Of course, if you do that, which many of us do in reaction, you're still in the game.

You're just playing it a different way. And you can still have that same crushing sense of living by your own guidelines, your own expectation. How do we get out of this? This is one of the most pragmatic ways to understand the sinful human condition by which these realities can be pressure for some of us.

They can be challenges for some of us. They can actually become idols for some of us. Others' expectations and our own expectations and pictures and ideas of what we should be become a kind of idolatry of our hearts whereby we have to live up to this and live by this in such a way that those guidelines and those expectations guide our lives far more than God.

How do we live by greater expectations? What we see in Jesus is there's two things that he employs in this short passage alone. It's not only provide a model for us, they do, but they provide a way in which he wants to empower us by his presence to live. The first is that his expectations were formed in prayer.

And second, his expectations were formed by the kingdom of God, the presence of God, the reign of God. That's what I mean when I say kingdom of God. Throughout the scriptures in the New Testament when we read about the life of Jesus, he's always slipping away to pray.

Is Jesus always slipping away to pray so that he can show himself to be the pious, reverent rabbi he's supposed to be? Well, he was pious and he was reverent, but I don't think that's why he was slipping away to pray. Jesus understood prayer and understood that in prayer, the expectations of others that can come crushing upon a person are reoriented to the expectations of God the Father. That indeed one of the reasons why we have to pray and what happens when you begin to understand prayer as communion with the Father and bonding with the Father, friendship with God, is that you are rushing to prayer.

You are waking up early or going late or slipping out at your lunch break or whatever you can do because you need your expectations that are beginning to come from other forces and other ways and beginning to crush you and weigh you down. You need them reoriented. You need to hear from God the Father yet again.

What are my expectations? What am I supposed to live? How am I living? The prayer is a reorientation and a correction of the expectations of others and our culture and our society. That's what happens in prayer. You're reset in the kingdom of God.

Your mind is cleared as to what you're living for. Learn to ask this question in prayer. Father, what would you have me do? That's an extension.

That's the way to extrapolate on thy kingdom come. They were taught to pray in the Our Father. Father, what would you have me do? And then learn to listen to his response.

Let him orient what he expects of you. For it's a grace-filled expectation. It's a mercy-based expectation.

He knows our frailty and our human condition. And yet he knows what we can become in Jesus. He knows what a spirit-filled human being can be, which is the realization of all that we were meant to be from the

beginning.

And we can in Jesus over the course of our life realize that and be free from the expectations of others that actually confuse us and cloud us and provide incredible barriers to moving forward in the kingdom of God. You may be part of a subculture that has an expectation of you. You need to be clear about those expectations, name them for what they are, and then reorient an expectation of God.

That's at the heart of prayer. Father, what would you have me do? And learn to listen to his response. Now we don't know what happened in that prayer time between Jesus and the Father, but we know that when Simon comes and says, everyone is looking for you, Jesus says, let's go on to the next towns.

There were hundreds in Capernaum waiting for him. Everyone is looking for you. But somehow Jesus knew there was one who is looking upon him that mattered the most.

And that one, the Father, had been about a work that Jesus knew from the scriptures, because he knew the scriptures and they fully oriented and influenced his expectations. That that one was about raising up Adam and Eve, that they may be fruitful and multiply. That that one, this God, this God of the kingdom, was about raising up Abraham, that he may go out from Ur, not stay but be sent out, that indeed all nations would come to know who God was through him.

That that one was the one who Joshua, he called Joshua to cross that river Jordan and move into the promised land, that again there could be multiplication of the work of God. That this God was always about moving on for the sake of the gospel and preaching the reality of the love of God. That indeed the gospel would be not about staying but about sending.

And that our lives are not about staying but about being sent again and again and again, sometimes geographically, as in Jesus's case here. He can't stay in Capernaum, as tempting as it might have been, but he must be sent out. But it's true for us emotionally, it's true for us spiritually, and sometimes geographically, that we're always being sent.

We can never stay in one place. This is a kingdom reality, and we orient our lives around that kingdom expectation, and we let ourselves be disrupted in our expectations of what this life is to be. Because we've oriented by the Father, and we understand the kingdom culture.

It's a culture of reaching out and reaching beyond. Jesus knew this. I'm so moved by the story of George Herbert.

George Herbert was a 17th century poet, one of the great English lyric poets. He was top of his class at Cambridge University, extremely gifted. As a matter of fact, he won the notice of King James, as in the King James Bible.

And King James saw the giftedness of this man for the kingdom of England, and he wanted him as one of his very top senior leaders, probably a kind of a secretary of state position. But Herbert knew this, he saw this, and he was a man so grounded in the life of prayer, a man so grounded in the kingdom of the scriptures, that he actually left all of this behind. Imagine one of our top senior post officials in the American government.

Imagine one of the folks who are probably gonna run for president in the next two years, all of a sudden say, no, you know what I need to go do is go pastor a church of 50 in Montana. That's what, that's exactly

what Herbert did. He left London, he went to a little town called Bemerton, in a tiny village that could seat about 50 to 75 people on a Sunday, and he pastored them for the rest of his life.

He happened to write poems on the side, and said to a friend at the end of his life, it used to be helpful to anybody, you know, pass them around, if not just destroy them. Because he was shaped by a kingdom expectation, not the expectation of a kingdom on earth. This has been a huge personal journey for me.

First of all, I'm wired in some way that would like to please every single human being on earth, and I'm actually intuitive enough to have a pretty good idea of what you're expecting of me, which is a very dangerous combination. And I'm driven enough to try. And then I'm put in leadership roles, where I have a large family, and they all have expectations of me.

I have a large church, they have expectations of me. And then I have a diocese, and they have expectations of me. I've basically put myself in a profound expectation world.

And I lead, so everyone expects, as they should, things of me. It's been times where, as I mentioned earlier on, it's been crushing. Times where I've absolutely slipped up and sought to please you or please someone else far more than God.

What's begun to happen over the years, as I try to live a life of prayer, and a life of kingdom culture, and God's Word. And it isn't always this way. But I've actually, as I've bonded to the Father more and more, I've become more concerned about disappointing the Father than disappointing others.

And that shift has changed, in many ways, how I go about my life. In many ways, you have to be clear about the question, who am I most concerned to disappoint? The Father or others? His expectation is that you'll give up your life to gain it. His expectation is that you won't stay in one place, but that you'll go out and share the good news of God.

Whose expectations guide your life? Others, your own, or God's? In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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