

# Who Are You Expecting?

## Luke 7:18-35

### Introduction

Earlier this month, my wife Karen and I hopped onboard a 15 passenger van in Columbus OH ready to participate in what was billed as “The Columbus Dessert Tour.” Based solely on the name of the event, we anticipated that we would be driven to multiple locations and treated to some of the most creatively rich and decadent desserts known to mankind: drizzled chocolate sauce, creamy cheesecakes, gourmet seven-layer cakes with the kind of icing that invokes diabetic comas – that sort of stuff.

And while what we actually got was good, I think the tour would have been better named “The Columbus Bakery Tour,” for we were served cookies and muffins. We had Jeni’s ice cream and a blueberry sorbet. At one stop we were served a “panettone,” which is seasonal sweet bread that retails for \$55 a loaf. Again, all very good ... but not what we were expecting.

That got me thinking: If I ever become famous enough to write my autobiography, there will be a chapter titled “That’s Not What I Expected” ... and it will be a very long chapter. There’s the story of ...

- The dessert tour will be in it, of course.
- On the evening of February 1, 1978 I swung the door to my dorm room open to find my dad standing in the hallway bearing news that mom died earlier that night. Not what I expected.
- A daughter who brought home a guy for me to meet. He was not what I expected (although it might fit better in a chapter titled “What Were You Thinking?”)
- No kid ever expects to find socks and underwear in one of the packages on Christmas morning.

According to our Gospel text, John the Baptist was having similar thoughts about Jesus, for we read he sent two of his own disciples to Jesus, instructing them to ask:

*Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else? (Luke 7:19)*

In other words ... “You are not what I expected.” Of all people, John the Baptist should have known what to expect. Before he was born, he was ordained by God to be the advance man for the coming Messiah. That’s what the angel proclaimed to his father Zechariah:

*And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. (Luke 1:17)*



We read that the connection between the two (John and Jesus) happened “in utero.” When pregnant Mary (mother of Jesus) visited the pregnant Elizabeth (mother of John):

*The baby (John) leaped in her (Elizabeth's) womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. (Luke 1:41)*

Even as John's ministry was at the height of its popularity, John continued to point the crowds toward Jesus. When crowds thought John was the Messiah, he told them:

*One who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. (Luke 3:16)*

And once, when Jesus was walking near where he was preaching, John told the crowds to look at Jesus:

*The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29)*

So deep down inside John knew that Jesus was the Messiah. He had known it for his whole life. But something prompted him to ask the question. Something caused him to say, “Jesus, You are not quite what I expected.” What might that have been?

## **1: JOHN HAD AN INCOMPLETE PICTURE**

He only knew what he had been told.

*John's disciples told him about all these things. (Luke 7:18)*

All these things? What were all these things? Earlier in this chapter:

- Jesus healed the centurion's servant
- Jesus raised the widow's son from the dead

John's disciples told him that Jesus had done “all these things.” These were the things that a faith healer would do. John understood that Jesus was coming to be the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” That was what John had been preparing the way for. Remember, John's consistent sermon theme was “Repent for the kingdom of God is near!” And repentance and healing don't seem to be on the same page.

So John, based on what he had been told, rightly question: “Are you the one I was expecting, or should I expect someone else?”

I find it fascinating how Jesus handles that question. Notice what He says to John's disciples:

*Go back and report to John what you have seen **and heard**: (Luke 7:22)*

Don't miss that second part. Seen and heard. They had seen the centurion's servant healed. They had seen the boy resurrected. But Jesus told to report both what they had seen and what they had heard. And then Jesus got specific. Tell John...

*The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.  
(Luke 7:22)*

You don't see the good news proclaimed. You hear it. You see the miracles. You hear the message. When you go back to John, give him the whole story!

At lot of people in that day struggled with accepting Jesus as the Messiah because they were relying on an incomplete picture. The widely accepted notion, taught by all the religious leaders was that the Messiah would come as a conquering hero, a military man who would drive Rome out of the Promised Land and re-establish Israel as a mighty nation. They looked at this itinerant preacher and thought "This is not who we expected." Many Jews today continue to have that same incomplete picture.

But it is not just a Jewish problem. A lot of people within the universal church today have incomplete pictures of Jesus as well. You see it in such comments as:

- My Jesus loves everyone just as they are
- The Jesus I know supports the same political agenda or social agenda that I do
- My Jesus just wants me to be happy

Jesus never allows Himself to be shaped by our incomplete pictures. Rather, He invites us to meet Him in our study of the Scriptures, in our connection to the community of faith, in our daily walks with. And as we do, we will discover a far more complete and accurate picture of Jesus. We will see and hear Him.

So John raised the question because he had an incomplete picture. What he expected isn't what was reported to him. That's not the Jesus he expected. We also know that ...

## **2: JOHN WAS IN A MAJOR LIFE CRISIS**

At this particular moment in time John was locked in prison and would soon be killed.

*But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, <sup>20</sup>Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison. (Luke 3:19-20)*

Matthew 14 tells the story of John's eventual execution. It is a rather gruesome tale. My Mama used to warn me to stay away from girls like that. "They will make you lose your head," she would say. I listened to my Mama. I found Karen. She took my heart, but I still have my head!

So there was John ... sitting in prison, knowing that the most powerful man in the land was unhappy with him, knowing that he had virtually no hope of ever seeing freedom again, it is understandable that he would begin to question whether Jesus was the One he should have expected.

Things weren't turning out right for him. I doubt John ever imagined that he would end his life in that way. Yet here he was. The Old Testament prophecies were clear that Jesus would have to suffer, but that doesn't mean that I am supposed to suffer too. Right?

Do you know anyone who has ever prayed:

*I don't understand, Jesus. I have served you faithfully. I go to church. I read my Bible. I put offering in the plate every week. I do everything right. So why am I going through this? This isn't what I expected.*

A major life crisis can very quickly bring to light the kind of Jesus we expect. It did for John, and it will for us.

#### **APPLICATION**

Despite the question posed by John, nothing about the response of Jesus suggests that John's faith was in jeopardy. Jesus doesn't chastise him. Jesus doesn't call on him to repent. And He doesn't answer John's question directly. He just says:

*Go back and tell John what you have just seen and heard: The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the wretched of the earth have God's salvation extended to them. Is this what you were expecting? (Luke 7:22-23)*

Take a look around you. See and hear all that Jesus is saying and doing. And you will find that He is all that you expected, and so much more. Amen.