

Big Expectations

Mark 10:35-45

Introduction

On July 30, 1967, 17-year-old Joni Eareckson went for a swim in the Chesapeake Bay. Diving into the water, she misjudged its depth, and crashed head first into rocks below. The consequence of this misjudgment was a neck fracture between her fourth and fifth vertebrae, resulting in her becoming a quadriplegic. The life of this young, talented, and beautiful woman was changed forever. All of her dreams were shattered in that one single moment.

In case you didn't know, Joni is a real person. If you don't know her story, I encourage you to google it. It's a story you need to know. Joni would go on to become incredibly successful and internationally known. Now 72 years old, she continues to be one of the leading Christian voices in this country on issues related to the disabled. She has achieved more than most of us. But the life she lives is not the life she had planned to live.

Joni is just one of a number of people who have big expectations about how their lives will be. And yet, for a variety of reasons, life for these people has turned out very differently. Joni's story is well known, but it is not an uncommon story. Every day many similar stories of once big expectations are experienced and told. Stories like:

- A husband and wife who worked all the overtime they could throughout their entire careers so they would be able to retire and travel the world ... only to learn of a terminal diagnosis days before their first trip.
- A young couple who desperately want a baby, experiencing miscarriage after miscarriage and now faced with the outrageous costs of adoption or fertility treatments and force themselves to smile while attending the baby showers of their friends and family members.
- A young mom with three small children who opens the door late one evening to find two police officers standing on her porch, and just barely hearing them as they ask her to come with them so she can identify the body of her husband killed in an auto accident earlier that evening.
- A young father whose wife decided the pressures of being a mother were simply more than she could handle, so she packed her things and moved out while he was at work.

If I were to go on telling such stories I could talk about careers paths interrupted, or lives that were destroyed by addictive substances, or dream homes destroyed by natural disasters, or families facing the realities of caring for aging relatives, and stories of a host of other big expectations that didn't turn out quite like the original plan.

- In fact, if I were to go on, I might eventually describe ... you.

In our Gospel today, we meet two men who have really big expectations about what their lives will be like. These are men who soon learn that their lives are not going to turn out nearly as wonderfully as they currently expected.

This is sermon three in our seven-part sermon series titled “Kingdom Come.” In this series we are demonstrating how life in the Kingdom of Christ – the kingdom that is coming – is different from life in the kingdom of this world. We are doing so because as Christians we know that the Kingdom of Christ IS coming, and we want to be good citizens of that kingdom starting here and now.

So today we meet James and John, the sons of Zebedee! That sounds like a great title for an action movie: Sons of Zebedee, starring Vin Diesel and Dwayne the Rock Johnson. Opening in theaters near you!

In today’s story, these two men came to Jesus with big expectations.

- Like the other 10 disciples, James and John had been walking with and working with Jesus for almost three years.
- Like the other 10, they were convinced that He was the Promised One – the Messiah – that every Jew for thousands of years had been expecting.
- Like every Jew they believed that the Messiah would conquering all their earthly enemies and re-establish Israel as the dominant political power in the world.
- Unlike the 9 of the other 10, James and John saw themselves as personal favorites of Jesus. These two, along with Peter, were often pulled away from the larger group to experience special moments with Jesus. They were the ones, for example, who experienced the appearance of Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Who can blame them for having big expectations? And so one day, after Jesus had finished a time of teaching, they brought those expectations to Jesus.

#1: WHAT THEY EXPECTED

They actually had two expectations, offered as requests when they shared them with Jesus. Here is the first one:

Expectation #1:

“Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” (Mark 10:35)

This first request is pretty general, so Jesus asked them to get a little bit more specific:

“What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. (Mark 10:36)

In other words, you want me to do what you ask, so what are you asking? They responded with expectation #2:

Expectation #2:

“Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.” (Mark 10:37)

Those are the power seats. When Jesus began his rule, and sat on His center throne, they would be co-vice presidents, one on each side. They would be important and respected men, the closest advisors to King Jesus. And maybe in the back of their minds, they were also thinking that they could start to boss around the other 10 disciples too. That’s apparently what the other 10 thought, for the text says:

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. (Mark 10:41)

James and John were still thinking in terms of an earthly kingdom. They thought that their expectations ought to drive God’s agenda. They saw nothing wrong with approaching Jesus to say “We want you to do whatever we ask.”

Now, before we respond too harshly to these brothers, let’s take a look inside our own hearts. I once heard it said ...

The hardest prayer to pray is “thy will be done.” We very skilled at praying “give me my daily bread,” but it is a more difficult struggle to yield our will to His will.

It’s easy to pray “Lord, here’s my life as I expect it to be. Now give me whatever I ask.” But when my expectations are not being me, can I just as easily pray “Thy will be done?”

#2: WHAT THEY RECEIVED

The response of Jesus was gentle and loving.

“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” (Mark 10:38)

In other words “Do you really think you are ready to endure everything I am about to endure?”

And then Jesus talks to all 12 of them about how expectations in the coming kingdom are to be different from those in the earthly kingdom.

- He tells that them that people in the earthly kingdom worry about positions of power and influence.
- That in the earthly kingdom, people care about who has the authority to do this or that.

But in the coming kingdom, all of that gets flipped upside down. Power, influence and authority aren’t valued. In the coming kingdom, it is all about serving and sacrifice. Listen to His words:

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:43b-45)

James and John came with one set of expectations about how life would be. What they received instead was totally different.

- John would eventually write five of the books now in our New Testament. He would die of old age after spending a number of years in exile on the island of Patmos.
- James would become the first of the disciples to be martyred for his faith. You can read about his death in Acts 12. A church historian by the name of Eusebius describes that death:

“The guard who brought (James) into court (before Herod) was so moved when he saw (James) testify that he confessed that he, too, was a Christian...So both were beheaded at the same time.” (Eusebius of Caesarea)

APPLICATION

Whether your life turns out exactly as planned or your expectations fall short, there is great peace and comfort in knowing the truth expressed in this very well-loved verse of the Bible:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

In the Old Testament, at the end of the book of Genesis, you can read a story about man named Joseph. This is a different Joseph than the man who was the father of Jesus. This Joseph was the favorite son of a man with 12 sons. His dad gave him special gifts and treated him in special ways – to the extent that his 11 brothers were jealous of him.

But Joseph knew God had called him to greatness. He expected that God would use in some mighty and powerful way. What he didn't expect was being sold into slavery by those jealous brothers, and thrown into jail by a jealous husband and basically forgotten. Those things happen in the earthly kingdom.

But in God's kingdom God continues to work in ways we don't understand to bring about His will in the lives of those who follow Him.

One day after many years of mistreatment and shattered expectations, Joseph's jealous brothers apologized. With tears in his eyes, Joseph tells his brothers:

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Genesis 50:20)

I want to encourage those of you who bring shattered expectations into this service today, those of you whose dreams will never happen, whose lives are forever changed

...

- The story is not yet over. And it may not turn out exactly as you imagined. But God will yet make it something good.

Amen.