

Palm Sunday: Expectations - Mark 11:1-11

If you are married, then you are very familiar with unmet expectations! Husbands and wives expect certain attitudes and actions from each other. Sometimes those expectations are unmet, creating tension, and then arguments.

After 30 years of marriage a husband and wife came for counseling. The therapist/counselor asked what the problem was. The wife went into a tirade listing every problem they had ever had in their thirty years of marriage: neglect, lack of intimacy, emptiness, loneliness, feeling unloved and unlovable. The wife had an entire list of unmet expectations she had endured.

Finally, after allowing the wife to complain for several minutes, the therapist got up and walked around the desk. After asking the wife to stand, he embraced and passionately kissed her as her husband watched - with a raised eyebrow.

The woman shut up and quietly sat down as though in a daze.

The therapist turned to the husband and said, "This is what your wife needs at least 3 days a week. Can you do this?"

The husband replied, "Well, I can drop her off here at your office on Mondays and Wednesdays, but on Fridays, I go fishing."

- **Expectation is the mother of all frustration.** *(If you've ever been frustrated then examine your expectations.)*
- **Disappointment is an unmet expectation.** *(If you expect drivers in TN to be considerate then you'll be disappointed.)*
- **Unmet expectations are the silent killer of relationships.** *(Disagreements in marriage over sex, money, and power are rooted in unmet expectations.)*

The first Palm Sunday when Jesus entered Jerusalem was a celebration, but it was followed by unmet expectations. Most often expectations are hidden and unspoken, and if you fail to live up to someone's expectations it causes conflict. Sometimes expectations are out in the open. The messianic expectations of Jews during Jesus' ministry were out in the open. Jews expected a messianic king.

Bibles title it "The Triumphal Entry." "Hosanna" means "Save!" but the people weren't thinking about salvation from personal and national sinfulness. They were hoping for political salvation from Roman oppression. They wanted a Messiah to defeat the Romans and then rule the coming kingdom of their father David.

They were probably familiar with Zechariah's prophecy about a Davidic king riding into Jerusalem on a donkey: Zechariah 9:9: *Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout in triumph, Daughter Jerusalem! Look, your King is coming to you; He is*

righteous and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Matthew makes this point because he wrote for a Jewish audience (Matthew 21:4-5). Matthew wanted Jews to know that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. The colt-foal of a donkey refers a young male donkey and mother donkey was also probably there.

The people shouted praises from the psalms written by David - Psalm 118:25-26: *Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord.* This confirms their expectation that the Messiah would restore the kingdom of David.

But a week later some Jews went from shouting “Hosanna to the king!” to “Crucify him!” What happened? What happened was some unmet expectations. Jesus of Nazareth wasn’t the Messiah they were hoping for.

Unmet expectations are why people get made at God and even deny His existence. Why doesn’t God stop evil? Why doesn’t God stop wars? Why doesn’t God heal my cancer? Why doesn’t God stop rape and murder? Why did God allow my spouse, son, daughter, brother, or sister to die? I’m angry at God!

A brief apologetic: There are three kinds of evil in the world: demonic, natural, and moral. Demonic evil comes from angels who rebelled against God and oppose his salvation plan for people. Natural evil comes from a creation under the curse of sin – disease, cancer, earthquakes, and hurricanes. Moral evil comes from people who can choose between good and evil and choose evil. What would happen if God intervened and stopped every demonic, natural, and moral evil? It would be an *almost* perfect world. “Almost” because there would be many frustrated people who want to do evil but they cannot. They want to lie, steal, be sexually immoral, and use power to oppress others, but they cannot. The Bible promises a perfect world in the future. In that new world people do not want to do evil. Their hearts have been changed. They love God and one another. Until we have that perfect world, people will experience unmet expectations of each other and also God.

The Psalms express unmet expectations. Psalm 73:2-6: *But as for me, my feet almost slipped; my steps nearly went astray. For I envied the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have an easy time until they die. They are not in trouble like others; they are not afflicted like most people. They are always at ease, and they increase their wealth.* The Psalmist expected the righteous to be blessed and the wicked cursed, not just after death, but NOW in this life. There’s Jeremiah’s complaint, 12:1-2: *You will be righteous, Lord, even if I bring a case against You. Yet, I wish to contend with You: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the treacherous live at ease? You planted them, and they have taken root. They*

have grown and produced fruit. You are ever on their lips, but far from their conscience. Why are all the richest people in the world non-Christians? Why does God allow evil dictators to persecute poor Christians?

Unmet expectations were probably a motive for Judas' betrayal of Christ. Christ refused the popular messianic hope of the Jewish people. There was a *zealot* among Jesus' disciples – Simon the Zealot (Mark 3:18-19). Zealots hated Roman occupation and taxes and advocated violent resistance. Simon the Zealot surrendered that expectation, but Judas may have tried to make it happen when he heard Christ say he would be crucified. God predestined Judas to betray Christ, but God didn't force Judas to do anything he didn't already want to do. Judas did what was in his heart to do. Judas was greedy. Matthew 26:14-16: *Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.* John notes that after Judas made his deal to betray Christ, Satan possessed him (John 13:27).

At the Friday night English Bible study we are studying Luke's Gospel. Expectations are implied and expressed in the first chapter. Luke's first chapter describes two miraculous births – John and Jesus. John is born to an old couple Zechariah & Elizabeth. Jesus is born to a young virgin. Elizabeth had been barren her whole marriage to Zechariah. I'm sure they had hoped and prayed for at least 30 years to have a child. That's an unmet expectation! God was waiting to do the impossible (Luke 1:37: "For nothing is impossible with God."). Gabriel said to Mary about her miraculous child named Jesus (1:32b-33), "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." The expectation of the Messiah re-establishing David's throne would become an unmet expectation.

Even after Jesus' resurrection the disciples still had false expectations. Just before Jesus' ascension the disciples had an expectation for the kingdom of Israel. Acts 1:6: "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus had a different agenda Acts 1:8: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The kingdom of Israel was never restored. The kingdom was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. Then the kingdom of God eclipsed it and began to grow around the world.

How often is Jesus' agenda different than ours? It's not that Jesus doesn't want to give us what we pray for, but his timing is probably different than ours. Or Jesus may want to change something in us before he answers our prayer. Jesus may want

to test our faith before he gives us what we ask for in his name. Delay is not denial of a prayer request. However, those possibilities may create unmet expectations for us.

Three Palm Sunday lessons:

Lesson 1: Jesus never disappoints. He may leave some of your expectations unmet, but he never disappoints. How can I make this claim? If our sins are forgiven and we enjoy the fellowship of the Holy Spirit in this life and we have the gift of eternal life, then how can we be disappointed? Jesus never disappoints with forgiveness of sins, with his mercy and grace, with the closeness of his presence. We can only be disappointed when *selfish* expectations are unmet.

When Joni Eareckson Tada was 17 she dove into a lake, broke her neck, and became a quadriplegic. She has lived in a wheelchair for 50 years. She was angry at God and wanted to die. After she received Christ as her Savior she gave up all her selfish expectations. She said ten words changed her life: “God permits what he hates, to accomplish what he loves.” God permitted the evil of Joni’s accident to accomplish her salvation and a worldwide ministry to disabled people. (I should be a quadriplegic, but God spared me.) She has never been disappointed with Christ’s love.

Lesson 2: We cannot come to Christ with selfish expectations. What would be some selfish expectations? The health and wealth prosperity teaching of some preachers would lead to false expectations and then falling away from faith. Jesus taught storing up your treasure in heaven not seeking or expecting it on earth! We don’t just add Jesus to our lives as a savior and then do what we want. We must submit to him as Lord. We would not pray, “I will believe in you for salvation and eternal life, but I’m not sure about really keeping your commands.” (Would you say to your boss, “I accept you as my boss, but I will not submit to you or carry out your orders.”) The primary way to come to Christ is in repentant humility. We have nothing to offer Christ but broken sinful lives for him to transform. Verse 3 of *Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me* admits this: *Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling; naked, come to thee for dress; helpless, look to thee for grace; foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die.* The Billy Graham crusade choir sang at the invitation, “Just as I am without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me... Just as I am, though tossed about; with many a conflict, many a doubt; fighting and fears within without. O Lamb of God, I come, I come.”

Lesson 3: I want to make a bold statement: You will never be disappointed (have unmet expectations) when you trust in the promises of God. Will we experience any unmet expectations when we pray God’s promises in Jesus’ name? Not if the promise is a promise

for anyone, anywhere, anytime, like the promise of salvation by faith in Christ. Romans 10:11-13: *For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

After we call on the name of the Lord and are saved we have another wonderful promise in Hebrews 4:14-16: *¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

It teaches us to approach Christ's throne of grace with humble confidence and receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Receive mercy and grace for any need. There is mercy and grace for marriages; mercy for physical healing; mercy and grace for perplexing problems. There's mercy and grace for the salvation of family members. (Someday I will preach about household salvation.) **Receiving salvation and then mercy and grace from our heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, will never be an unmet expectation.**