

Unmet Expectations

Luke 7:18-23

Arlington McRae

Subject: An improper understanding of the Messiah

Complement: can lead to distrust and rejection of Him

Sermon idea: Unmet expectations can lead to distrust and rejection of the Messiah

Introduction

Have you ever had your mind set on something, you knew exactly what you wanted to happen, when it should happen, and how it should happen. But when it comes, it is not happening the way you were expecting. So what do you do? You get busy trying to make it come out the way you planned it. I am experiencing that now.

My wife and I have been living in our current house a number of years. During the first five years, our house was burglarized 3-5 times. Houses in our neighborhood sit on a half-acre or more of land. Unlike your typical planned community, houses are not adjacent to each other. Because of the way our house is situated on the lot, a burglar could easily go unnoticed. Considering our history with burglaries and the prevalence of crime in our city, we have become very security conscience.

One of the solutions we have pondered for many years was building a fence around our house. My wife wanted a fence. I did not. My concern was aesthetics. Hers was security. So we have spent a lot of time determining exactly the look and quality of fence we wanted. We have a picture in our minds of the exact fence we want. Our expectations are firmly set.

The fence is currently under construction and we are having your typical problems with the fence contractor: delays, misrepresentations, fence placed in the wrong place, poor-quality work, and the like. As the man of the house, it has been my responsibility to negotiate with and manage the contractor. As you can imagine, it has been a struggle and very frustrating for me. Now, my wife is a full-time student who is struggling to graduate in the fall. As a result, she is not involved in the day-to-day struggles with the fence contractor.

Several weeks into the project, she questioned me by asking "What do you think about the work on the fence?" She knew before she asked me, that I was very displeased and very frustrated with the work thus far. Yet she asked me "What do you think about the work on the fence?" Why did she ask me something she already knew the answer to? With her question, she wasn't really asking me, she was actually trying to tell me something. In her own way, what I think she was

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telling me is "Honey, the contractor's work does not meet my expectations. What are you doing about it?"

As we look at Luke's presentation in our text today, I see John The Baptist asking Jesus the same type of question my wife asked me. Let's take a look.

Turn with me please to Luke 7:18-23:

Luke 7:18-23

- 18 And the disciples of John reported to him about all these things.
- 19 And summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?"
- 20 And when the men had come to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?'"
- 21 At that very time He cured many {people} of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He granted sight to many {who were} blind.
- 21 And He answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: {the} blind receive sight, {the} lame walk, {the} lepers are cleansed, and {the} deaf hear, {the} dead are raised up, {the} poor have the gospel preached to them.
- 23 "And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me."
(NAS)

An improper understanding of the Messiah leads to wrong expectations

John heard the reports on the work of Jesus and he was not pleased with what he heard. Jesus was out in the countryside dealing with the outcasts, the lame, the sick, the dead and the poor. That wasn't what he was suppose to be doing. So John sent him a message, saying in effect, "you're the Messiah, and you are not doing what the Messiah was sent to do.

An obvious interpretation of this passage is that John was in doubt or his faith was waning. However, there appears to be a more plausible interpretation. In order to understand the motive behind John's question, we need a little background information on John and his relationship with Jesus.

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- 1) John was well versed in the Scriptures and the messianic prophecies. We know this to be true because Jesus' answer to John's question presumed John would understand the significance of his reference to Isaiah 35:5 and 61:1. In Luke Chapter 3 and John Chapter 1, John identifies himself as "The voice of the one crying in the wilderness" as prophesized in the book of Isaiah. He expected to see Him.
- 2) John was "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" in order to escape "the wrath to come" (Lk 3:7) In John's view, "The ax is already laid at the root of the trees" (Lk 3:9). In John's mind, the kingdom of God was at hand. The Messiah would be coming soon to deal with sinners (Lk 3:9) and the enemies of God.
- 3) John would have been influenced by the prevailing view of the Messiah at that time. According to "The New Unger's Bible Dictionary", the prevailing view of the Messiah by the Jews omitted the "deepest thought of the messiahship, the salvation of the world from sin. In keeping with this, the priestly office of the Messiah was also lost sight of, as was the prophetic office of the Messiah. The all-absorbing ideas were those of kingship and deliverance" (page 840). In other words, John's focus was on the work of the Messiah as the conquering king. He gave little thought to the Messiah as prophet and priest.
- 4) John already knew Jesus was the Messiah. John baptized Jesus and saw "the Holy Spirit descend upon him like a dove in bodily form" (Lk 3 and John 1). John had knowledge of the work of Christ. In the context of Luke alone, he received various reports on the work of Christ. In fact, it was these reports which prompted his complaint. These reports were sufficient for him to conclude that Jesus was the Christ.

John knew the Scriptures and John knew Jesus was the Messiah. But John had his own ideas about the work the Messiah should be doing. John was expecting Messiah to bring the wrath of God. In John's view, "The ax was already laid at the root of the trees" (Lk 3:9). In John's mind, the kingdom of God was at hand. He expected the Messiah to deal harshly with all the evildoers, the Pharisees, and the Romans.

John's focus on the work of the Messiah dealt with His kingship to the exclusion of His role as prophet and priest. John had an improper understanding of the role of the Messiah which led to wrong expectations.

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John knew for whom he was called and the purpose of his calling.
John was knowledgeable of the Scriptures and the messianic prophecies.
John baptized Jesus and saw the Spirit descend like a dove and remain on Him.
(Lk 3, Jn 1)

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John had knowledge of the work of the Messiah and the relationship of that work to the Scriptures.

Therefore John should have known that Jesus was the Messiah.

And John did know that Jesus was the Messiah.

In view of the facts, it is unreasonable to conclude that John did not know the identity of the Messiah. Therefore, what was the nature of his question: "Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else? John had his own ideas about what the Messiah should be doing. John was expecting the wrath of God to come. In John's view, "The ax was already laid at the root of the trees" (Lk 3:9). In John's mind, the kingdom of God was at hand. He expected the Messiah to deal harshly with all the evildoers, the Pharisees, and the Romans.

The Jews were an oppressed people, oppressed by the Romans and oppressed by their own leaders. They needed deliverance from their oppression.

Therefore, their focus was on the Messiah as the king of deliverance. The Messiah is the descendant of King David, the conquering king. John expected Jesus would follow in David's footsteps, subduing his enemies, overthrowing the oppressors. John couldn't understand why Jesus was spending all his time with the deceased, the very poor, the outcast, and the acknowledged violators of the Law rather than setting up his throng to conquer the enemies of God. John's complaint to Jesus said in effect "You are the Messiah, but you have your priorities mixed up." Jesus needed to change his methods. He needed to get with the program.

John's focus on the work of the Messiah dealt with his kingship to the exclusion of his role as prophet and priest. John had an improper understanding of the role of the Messiah which lead to wrong expectations.

You see, An improper understanding of the Messiah leads to wrong expectations

And when our wrong expectations are not met, we complain. Our complaints are often disguised as questions. My wife approached me with a question about the fence. But what she was actually doing was complaining because her expectations were not being met. John's question is his complaint to Jesus because his wrong expectations were not being met.

A friend of mine, a mighty man of God, shared an experience with me which I thought was significant. To him it pointed out the patience of leadership. To me it also showed something else. My friend was on a retreat given for the ministerial staff at his church. In the midst of a presentation by the pastor, a young minister stood up to say that he wasn't getting the kind of respect due him as a minister. He thought he should have more opportunities to preach but many of the tasks assigned to him had nothing to do with preaching and administering the word.

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My friend expected the pastor to rebuke him for bringing up such a matter in the midst of a session that had nothing to do with his complaint. Instead, the pastor gently took him through the Word to show him that as ministers, we are servants. People don't serve us, we serve the people. This young minister had set wrong expectations due to an improper understanding of Scripture. And now he was complaining.

Unmet expectations can lead to distrust and rejection of Christ.

Jesus understood the motive behind John's question. Jesus understood that John was displeased. Jesus understood that John had a scenario already worked out for Him. So many of us have our life scenarios already worked out. And not only our lives, but we have scenarios for those around us. We have stereotyped ideas about how others ought to behave. And when our scenarios don't work out, we begin to question those around us. "Why did you do that?" or "Why did you say that to me?" "How can you be friends with him?" Our complaints become questions. Because our complaints are often disguised as questions.

Because Jesus understood the motive behind John's question, he answered both his question and his complaint.

He answered John's question by pointing to the evidence. He provided John's disciples with a first hand experience of His miracles. In their presence, He cured many of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He granted sight to many who were blind. Then He gave them His message for John. Go tell John exactly what you have seen and what you have heard. In this way, it would not be a message of hearsay. They could testify from their own personal experiences. Then He gave them words to speak so the message to John would be clear. Quoting and paraphrasing Isaiah, the message to John would have the authority of God: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them. In his own gentle way, Jesus was telling John to question the basis of his expectations, don't question God!

After answering his question, Jesus answered John's complaint. Jesus knew that John had an improper understanding of the Messiah which lead him to wrong expectations. Jesus knew John had expected a different scenario. John was having difficulty because Jesus was not living up to John's expectations. If John's complaint went unchecked, it could lead to distrust and rejection of the Messiah. So Jesus' final word to John was to keep on trusting and obeying for blessings were sure to come.

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Unmet expectations can lead to distrust and rejection of Christ.

John had a complaint about the work of the Messiah in his life. So he went to Him for resolution. He didn't keep it to himself. He didn't talk about Jesus behind his back. He didn't complain or debate it with his disciples. He went to Jesus. Jesus understood his need and provided the solution. It wasn't the solution John was seeking, but it was the will of God. Scriptures do not tell us John's reaction to Jesus' response.

When our young minister had a complaint about the work of Christ in his life, his lack of preaching time, and the work he saw as unbecoming a minister, he didn't keep it to himself. He didn't complain to other ministers. He went to his pastor. His pastor immediately understood his need. With care and feeding, his pastor was able to lead him to the establishment of proper expectations in his ministerial role.

Both John and our young minister expressed their discontentment and were put on the correct path. But what happens when there is no one to minister to us like this young minister had? What happens when we fail to share our dissatisfaction with the role of Christ in our lives? When we fail to find satisfactory solutions to our complaints, they grow into major problems which can lead to extreme actions. And if they go unchecked, they can lead to distrust and even rejection of Christ.

Conclusion

Your concept of the Messiah shapes your view and acceptance of the ministry to which you are called. What is your perception of the work the Messiah has given you? Have you set proper expectations? But try as you might, you won't get it right all the time.

So! When your expectations are not met, knowledge alone is not sufficient to keep you from distrusting or rejecting the Messiah. John the Baptist had knowledge and first hand experience with Jesus. Yet he struggled with the role of the Messiah in his life.

When things happen that you don't understand, when your expectations aren't met, remember Jesus' twofold response to John: 1) don't question God, question the basis of your expectations, and 2) keep on trusting and obeying Him, for His blessings are sure to come.