

Great Expectations

Intro. Movies and books often use flash backs and fast forwards to give the viewer/reader important details that help explain the thoughts and actions of the characters. Last week we met John at the start of his “job” full of energy, talking about fire and wrath in announcing the coming of the Messiah. This week we fast forward from the third chapter of Matthew to the eleventh to find he is in jail and questioning if he finished his job. What he heard about the Lord’s actions aren’t exactly what he was expecting of the Messiah. We discover John was subject to doubts like the rest of us.

I. It seems confusing to think after baptizing the Lord that John wouldn’t recognize him later. Once the Lord showed up at the river, John’s time was ended. He withdrew from the stage, got in trouble

with Herod and was arrested. Meanwhile the Lord began his work. What John heard about the Lord was not what he expected. His understanding of what the Messiah would do, was like the Israelites’: a powerful figure who would strike down the Romans and unbelievers. What the Lord was doing was very different. John thought there would be more fire and brimstone; less mercy and healing. John didn’t fear so much that his life was over but rather that he might die without knowing if the Messiah had been identified and have the satisfaction of knowing he completed his mission. To his questions, the Lord never answered directly. He simply pointed to his actions: miraculous healing of the sick that were the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. His reply may also have sent a message that the Lord hoped John would not take

“offense” that the Lord didn’t fulfill his expectations of the Messiah. As we know from scripture, there were many who rejected the Lord based on their own false expectations. When John received the report from his disciples, he believed the Lord was indeed the Messiah and his job done. His prayer might have echoed Simeon’s words at the Lord’s presentation in the temple: Master, now you can now dismiss your servant in peace...for my eyes have seen your salvation [Luke 2:29-30].

Concl. *Our* expectations of God and ourselves are sometimes wrong. We want God to *punish* other people and *rescue* us from our screw ups. When we start something new – a job or a school (*or a new parish*) – we sometimes think, “This isn’t what I thought it would be at all.” Our expectations die hard. A sign of wisdom is realizing that and making

changes. John had to adjust *his* when he heard about the signs the Lord was doing. We have to adjust our expectations also. It doesn’t mean we devalue or abandon them; just be more realistic for ourselves and those around us. The Lord said John was the messenger from God, preparing his way, but no more important in the kingdom of heaven than any of us. We can do some of the works the Lord did. We can bring *light* to someone’s *darkness*; help others to *walk* rather than *stumble* through life; and speak God’s Word to those who haven’t heard it. It is unlikely most of us will raise the dead, but we **can** bring new life to someone who feels there is no life for them. In a world hungry and thirsty for it, this is good news.

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