

The Cast | People Engaged In the Story of Jesus Christ

The Disciples of John (What Did You Expect?)

Luke 7.18-35

February 12, 2017

The disciples of John reported to him about all these things. ¹⁹ 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 When the men came to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, to ask, '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 gave sight to many who were blind. ²² 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 "Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

²⁴ When the messengers of John had left, He began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ²⁵ "But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are found in royal palaces! ²⁶ "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. ²⁷ "This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.' ²⁸ "I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." ²⁹ When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. ³⁰ But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John. ³¹ "To what then shall I compare the men of this generation, and what are they like? ³² "They are like children who sit in the market place and call to one another, and they say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.' ³³ "For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon!' ³⁴ "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' ³⁵ "Yet wisdom is vindicated by all her children."

³⁶ Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.

We're looking at the Gospels According to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John... and we're especially interested in the immense cast of characters who interact with Jesus Christ. It's IN these interactions with these people that we get to know the Main Character – Jesus Christ is revealed through His exchanges and encounters with all these characters.

This is kind of a series within the series to consider the idea of discipleship. What IS it to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in the modern world?

Today, a small delegation comes from John the Baptist...and they're all a little confused...and maybe a little disappointed about what they're seeing (and what they're NOT seeing!) in the work and words and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. He is not measuring UP to their EXPECTATIONS... THAT'S THE WORD FOR THE DAY... "What did you expect? What were your expectations?"

And from the start of this sermon, I want to engage YOU...some of whom are modern disciples...some who are "would-be" disciples, some are spiritually curious/searching... but ALL of us have expectations about life...about the future... about college ...career ...relationships ...family ...about retirement and the purpose of life...about God. What are YOUR expectations? Have you had disappointments and unfulfilled expectations...are you jaded/disillusioned and constantly LOWERING your hopes so you won't be disappointed? WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?

That's the Big Question!

Let's look at: Expectations **EXPLORED**, Expectations **EXCHANGED** and Expectations **EXCEEDED**.

I wonder if you've explored YOUR own expectations about life. If you're ever disappointed at life or disappointed with God or with yourself or others...and where did you GET those expectations?

Some people DO inspect their own expectations and may determine that they were misguided or too small and they may make mid-course corrections... sometimes in a good way like exercise or taking a class or joining a group (it's now February - how are your New Year's resolutions coming?).

And sometimes in not-so-good ways; e.g. the proverbial mid-life crisis where people sometimes bail out of a marriage. Sometimes college students go away and discover alternative belief systems ...decide that their expectations of God and life were too "provincial" or unsophisticated.

It's fairly common that in time...in the process of re-examining one's expectations... after facing some of the bumps in the road that everyone faces... some people go from very high hopes...then some very BIG disappointments ...they become more "realistic"... and some become sort of cynical (remember, cynics almost always describe themselves as "realists").

And some figure out that the way to avoid disappointment is to gradually lower your expectations ...You begin to settle for a marriage that's "mutual toleration", friends that are really only surface acquaintances (no real depth/intimacy) a job that's just a way to survive ("livin' for the weekend")... Like the Pink Floyd song, "I have become comfortably numb."

Low expectations means no disappointments!

So again...what are YOUR expectations for this coming year, for your life, for God AND HOW are those expectations shaped by forces (like your parents or grandparents or friends or advertisers who depict the American Dream)? Have you become jaded or cynical... "realistic"... disappointed?

The passage is clearly ABOUT expectations and the need to question them. Look at the six question marks in vv. 24 – 26 "What did you expect?"

It begins with John the Baptist in jail and awaiting trial...He won't get that trial (as you may know) and there languishing in jail...hearing only rumors and whispers of life outside, John sends two of HIS students to inquire, "Are you the expected One?"

It's almost as if Jesus answers, "Am I the expected One?... Well, that depends on WHAT you expect."

"We expected a Messiah who would bring the Kingdom of God, who would destroy sin and unrighteousness and injustice and oppression. We expected a Messiah who would destroy all that is wrong and who would accomplish this by JUDGMENT. The Messiah we expected would confront the "powers that be" and have a great reckoning and balance the books.

And when John the Baptist heard that Jesus Christ was spending all His time with powerless folks like fishermen and sick people and widows and sinners and weirdoes (insane people and possessed by spirits) ...and people obviously cursed by God and the poor... and when John the Baptist heard it, he said, "Hmmm...this is NOT what I expected!"

He thought of a Messiah who would cleanse the Halls of Power and instead He is going to the power-LESS. He expected a Messiah who would go BIG...go NATIONAL...even go INTERNATIONAL and kick out those bad Romans... but instead Jesus is spending time with "folks"...just plain everyday people (The Cast).

Where's the cleansing? Where's the judgment on sin? Where are the fireworks and the expectations?

It's a kind of crisis of faith for John the Baptist... he probably didn't expect to be in jail when the Kingdom was coming... A N D ... IS this even the Kingdom?

The movie About Schmidt... is the story of a man waiting for life to begin...It opens with him staring at the clock...waiting for 5:00PM...so he can clock-out for the last time and then retire (as an insurance actuarial)... He and Mrs. Schmidt have a new Winnebago...and within days after his retirement... Mrs. Schmidt dies...and then he finds that she's been having an affair with his best

friend...and all his hopes are shattered...all his expectations about how life would go are...GONE....And in the face of this CRISIS, Schmidt has to reassess everything and re-adjust all of his expectations.

And in the end of About Schmidt (no spoilers) he realizes that it is really NOT about Schmidt.

In today's passage a different kind of crisis pushes people to question their expectations about God and life and history. And Jesus Christ helps John's disciples and His own disciples and the crowds and the religious people AND US... He helps us explore our misguided expectations and then EXCHANGE those expectations... for something infinitely better!

The way Jesus Christ capitalizes on this crisis (He does not waste the crisis – because a crisis is a terrible thing to waste!) IS by use of what the ancient Christian writer Cyril of Alexandria (c 400AD) Cyril called it “Divine Pedagogy” i.e. the instructional method of Jesus Christ. “Tell John what you are seeing...come and see for yourselves...and weigh what you see against the prophecies that tell of what the promised One will do.”

"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.

Jesus Christ doesn't simply give a yes/no answer (that's NOT the divine instructional method or pedagogy) – He invites them to think it through... get your expectations NOT from your own heart...not from your society or culture or family or advertisers but from God... He told you what to expect.

And then Jesus adds (23), "Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me." In other words, “I can only help you if you are willing to trust Me despite YOUR expectations and MY appearance... I will bring about judgment...but I will DO IT in such a counterintuitive way... that MANY will be scandalized... I WILL BE BOTH THE JUDGE and the One who is JUDGED...something no one expects!”

And the only way you will be able to accept this scandalous gift...this implausible...illogical... upside-down atrocity ...is to trust Me...to allow Me to exchange your misguided expectations for the Truth!

I will die...so that YOU can live...I will be condemned so that YOU can be acquitted... I will take the fall so that YOU can stand in the presence of God's glory blameless with great joy (Jude 24)... I will become a grotesque monstrosity (Isaiah 53.3) so that YOU can be counted beautiful and pure...

And then Jesus looks to the crowds and says, “What did you expect from John? Someone who simply reinforced your preconceptions and your opinions?”

“No – John was the embodiment of the Law. He diagnosed your sickness...He pointed to your guilt and told you to humble yourselves so I could help you!”

And many in the crowd GOT IT...they had gone to John and repented...they were the disappointed... people who disappointed their parents...people who had disappointed themselves...who had not lived up to God’s commands...the failed...the frustrated... PEOPLE WHO NEEDED CLEANSING AND NEW LIFE.

And the humble...the disappointed and disappointing, they went to John and wept...and were baptized... they traded in their expectations...and they rejoiced at the words of Jesus Christ.

But the “good people”...who thought John was just weird.... and way too unrefined/crude (WHO does he think he issome kind’a prophet?)... the Pharisees and theologians were NOT baptized by John.

And Jesus says to these “good people”, “You guys are like children who don’t know how to play the simplest child-like games... John said, ‘Simon says...’ and you said ‘Who is Simon?’”

“I said ‘Red-Rover, Red-Rover – everyone come over!’ and you religious people said, ‘Huh’...we don’t get it?” You’ve forgotten how to be children.”

“John was the voice of the Law serious, austere, accusing, fasting, ...but you wouldn’t weep!”

“I AM the Voice of grace, the Lord of the Dance – coming to play and celebrate, to eat and drink and bring broken humble, needy sinners into the Father’s House of joy but you religious people won’t dance.”

“You don’t get the Law and you don’t get the Gospel and... I’m appealing to that lost little boy and the frightened little girl inside of you... but YOU’RE ALL TOO GROWN UP to respond.”

And it’s NOT because their expectations were too high... they were actually too low...the serious spiritual giants/theologians were jaded... cynical and too grown up – they thought that to humble themselves was childish/silly but it would have opened a window into their musty old souls. If they’d only WEPT with John...they would now be dancing with Jesus... their pride was killing them.

Jesus says, “Wisdom is vindicated by all her children”. In other words, it’s wisdom to give up your paltry expectations and simply respond to what God is doing.

Maybe you thought you'd be further along in your career at this point...or that you'd be healthier...happier...more successful...more popular...be married...have a better marriage... You didn't expect this or that...wondering if your life matters... BUT this sense of disappointment MAY be the window into your soul that God will use.

And when you see it...when your sense of disappointment...even despair...when you face it before the Face of God in Jesus Christ...that could be (as Charles Dickens wrote) "the memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me." It could be the birth of wisdom for you – a crisis not wasted...but redeemed.

It's wisdom to respond to John, the symbol of the Law and see where you fall short and weep. THAT is wisdom!

And it's WISDOM to hear the PIPES – the Piper is come and is playing – THE LORD OF THE DANCE is calling us to join in. He plays an infinitely happy tune. "I have taken away your guilt – come eat and drink with Me and dance!"

The Piper is God come to eat with sinners! It's God in Jesus Christ come to sit and celebrate with disappointed/disappointing PEOPLE ...He eats and drinks with tax-collectors and prostitutes and people with really bad credit scores...and divorced people...and people who have trouble holding a job...people with gossip habits and skeletons in their closets...people who are sexually messed up...God is sitting with difficult people without many friends ...and people who wish they were married...and some who wish they weren't...God comes to eat with sinners...

Our expectations are only too small ... we underestimate how God will actually accomplish His victory. St. Paul will put it this way, "These are things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered our imagination, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Cor 2.9)

Real wisdom says, "Whatever I expected from this life...from myself...from God...when I see what Jesus Christ has done and WILL do to rescue all creation and to make me new FULLY ALIVE ... When I am trusting Him I see that my expectations are WAY too low. And whatever befalls me in this life can only work for my ultimate good.

I can't judge by my circumstances (whether I'm in jail or just got a big raise) – I can't imagine the magnitude of God's love and His plan... I can only mourn over my sin and rejoice over my Savior and let HIM reshape my expectations as I TRUST.

Maybe today is that "memorable day" (Dickens) for YOU...the day you give Jesus Christ your expectations and He begins to assure you saying "trust in Me and ultimately you will not be disappointed...but eternally surprised with unimaginable JOY..."

Come and talk to me.