

## Luke 24:13-27

### When God Disappoints You

*But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel – v. 21*

I have a question I would like you to consider before God this morning. I want you to answer it to yourself and I want you to be honest before God. Here's the question: Has God ever disappointed you? I say that I want you to answer this question honestly to yourself before God this morning because I have little doubt that if I was to call on any or all of you to stand and give your answer audibly so that we could all hear your answer – I have no doubt that the common response would be – *Why no – God has never disappointed me. God has always been good to me. God has bountifully blessed me. How could I ever harbor such a notion that God has at any time disappointed me?*

That would be the expected answer, I suppose. And that answer would align itself with our orthodoxy for our doctrine teaches us that God is good. And yet by answering the question that way we would find ourselves taking exception to many characters in the Bible that either say or demonstrate that God has at one time or another disappointed them.

Listen to the words of Moses in Exod. 5:22,23 *And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all.* Those don't sound like the words of one who was entirely satisfied with God, do they? Moses was disappointed with God.

From our Scripture reading today we have the words of Asaph in Psalm 77. Listen to the words of v. 3 *I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.* And a few verses later we find him venting his complaint: *Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* (vv. 7-9). What deep disappointment with God these words convey to us.

Or take the words of Jonah in Jonah 4:8,9 *And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live. And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.* In this case, to say that Jonah was disappointed with God is to put the matter too lightly. Jonah was just flat out angry with God – angry to the point where he would just as soon God took his life then left him to stew in his anger.

The passage we just read from in Luke 24 is another case in point. The Emmaus road disciples were disappointed with God or with Christ. *But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.* The word *trusted* is translated in most every other English translation by the word *hope*. *We had hoped* they said. *We were hoping that it was he who was going to redeem Israel.* When Christ had entered triumphantly into Jerusalem

the hopes of all his followers were very high but never had hopes been raised so high only to be completely dashed to pieces. Here again it is an understatement to say that they were disappointed with God or with Christ.

And so I call on you again to ask yourself the question but now with some Biblical perspective on the matter – Have you ever been disappointed with God? And I think that now that we've shed some light of Scripture on the matter you'll find yourself more ready to admit to yourself, if not to others, that yes – there have been times when I've been disappointed with God.

We know, of course, that we shouldn't be disappointed with God. We know that at the end of the day the problem is not with God the problem is with us. God is good. God does do all things well. The testimony of Scripture is true that *all things work together for good to them that love God*. This is what may contribute to our reluctance to admit that we're disappointed with God. Deep down in our hearts we know that when such disappointments come the problem rests with us and not with God. And if we're willing to acknowledge that the problem rests with us and not with God then we position ourselves to truly deal with the issue. And we must deal with the issue. It's impossible for a Christian to function as he should if the matter of disappointment with God hangs suspended over his soul.

Such a Christian knows no peace or joy – such a Christian finds himself unable to bask in God's grace or God's love – such a Christian finds himself completely lacking in spiritual vitality. The Psalmist says in Ps. 77:3 *Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary*. And in a Psalm the reflects the same spirit as Psalm 77, the Psalmist in Ps. 73:16,17 says *When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God*. Here, then, is a compelling reason for taking up the matter of being disappointed with God. It's a painful matter. And we must choose between stewing in continual pain or facing the matter squarely. The Psalmist tells us the matter was too painful until he went into the sanctuary of God. We are here this morning in the sanctuary of God. We are in the right place, therefore, to face the issue squarely.

And so I want to deal with that issue this morning, the issue of being disappointed with God. And the way I want to treat the subject is by looking at what we may call case studies in the Scriptures and through these case studies we will learn to:

## Identify the Causes of Being Disappointed with God

Consider with me first of all that when the Lord disappoints you:

### I. It's Because Your Understanding is Defective

The Emmaus road disciples demonstrate this to us. Listen again to these ironic words spoken in Lk. 24:21 *But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel*. I call these words ironic because the very thing that those disciples had hoped for had indeed been accomplished. But their understanding of God's purpose in redemption was defective. They didn't see how any good could come from the One in whom they had

placed their hopes being put to the cruel and agonizing death of the cross. Surely this can't be the way anything good is accomplished. All Christ's death amounted to, in their opinion, was the triumph of evil and the forces of darkness. And yet in the midst of their doom and gloom Christ had, in fact, brought forth the greatest triumph out of what appeared to be the most ignominious defeat. Redemption had been accomplished. Israel had been redeemed and had been redeemed in the only way possible for redemption to be accomplished which was through the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

*Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?* – Christ says to them in v. 26. *And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself* (v. 27). Their defective understanding was addressed by Christ but then Christ did something equally as important as expounding the Scriptures to them. It says a few verses later in v. 31 that *their eyes were opened, and they knew him*. And a few verses later the same thing is said with regard to the rest of the disciples Lu 24:45 *Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures*.

I take both of these verses to convey to us the truth that not only were their minds properly informed but their hearts were opened to perceive what their minds now knew. And what their minds and hearts came to affirm was Christ's statement in v. 26 that Christ had to suffer these things and then enter into glory. That's a truth, you know, a principle, if you will, that continues to be true today. If I could state the present day application of the principle I would say it like this: suffering precedes glory.

If it is God's purpose to conform us to the image of his Son then we can expect in one way or another (and there are a variety of ways) to live out this truth – suffering precedes glory. You think about it for a moment and I'm sure you will agree with me that this is the repeated pattern in Scripture – suffering precedes glory.

I'm reminded of Joseph's dream that he would be exalted above his brothers. That dream did come to pass but not before Joseph was sold into slavery and not before Joseph spent time in prison – not before Joseph had forgotten altogether about his own dreams.

And David was told by Samuel that he was to be the next ruler in Israel. And when you read the account of David in 1 and 2 Samuel it seems that when David was anointed by Samuel to be the next King – that's when his problems really began. For the next several years he would flee from Saul. There would be but a step between him and death until at last he became so discouraged that we find him saying in 1Sam. 27:1 *I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand*.

And of Christ himself we read in Isa. 53:10,11 *he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities*.

What a rich prophetic statement this is about Christ and how it illustrates to us the principle that is now under consideration that suffering precedes glory. *He shall see his seed.* A people, you see, had been given to Christ by his Father. Christ is mindful of these people. If he would have them for his own then his soul must undergo travail or anguish. Suffering precedes glory, you see. The suffering of Christ precedes his people being glorified.

Now I say that it is here, especially, that we must appreciate the principle that suffering precedes glory. And our failure to understand or appreciate this truth will lead us to be disappointed with God. Let me share with you a very practical and personal way in which I must know and appreciate this truth.

If I had my way with God, I would not be agonizing over wayward children in my own family. Those children would have come to Christ long ago and would not have to imitate the prodigal by going and sowing their wild oats. And I dare say, here, that many parents find themselves disappointed with God because God has not done things the way those parents would want to see things done. When you stop and think about it, though, what we may really be disappointed about is the fact that our own comfort zones have been invaded by God and our pride has been humbled by God.

And the thing we have to bear in mind, here, is that not even the matter of our children's salvation is about us – it is rather, about God and about what best brings glory to God. And if Christ must travail to gain the souls that were given to him then it is not unreasonable for us to travail over the souls that are given to us. The thing we must avoid is becoming disappointed with God because he has not accomplished our desires in accordance with our view or our timetable of how those desires ought to be fulfilled.

We must instead do all in our power to aid our defective understanding, recognizing as we must that God's ways are not our ways nor are his thoughts our thoughts nor, for that matter, is our timetable his timetable. He is, however, faithful to his promises. This is why I was so thrilled to learn of a Muslim man in Toronto who was saved following 27 years of his wife travailing in prayer for his soul.

I read a Spurgeon sermon this last week in which Spurgeon tells a very interesting and inspiring story of a Father who desired the salvation of his sons. Let me relate it to you in Spurgeon's own words;

“A father once had been a pious man for many years, yet never had he the happiness of seeing one of his sons converted. He had his children round his bed, and he said to them when dying, "My sons, I could die in peace, if I could but believe you would follow me to heaven; but this is the most sorrowful thing of all--not that I am dying, but that I am leaving you to meet you no more." They looked at him, but they would not think on their ways. They went away. Their father was suddenly overtaken with great clouds and darkness of mind; instead of dying peacefully and happily, he died in great misery of soul, but still trusting in Christ. He said, when he died, "Oh! that I had died a happy death, for that would have been a testimony to my sons; but now, O God, this darkness and these

clouds have in some degree taken away my power to witness to the truth of thy religion." Well, he died, and was buried. The sons came to the funeral. The day after, one of them said to his brother, "Brother, I have been thinking, father was always a pious man, and if his death was yet such a gloomy one, how gloomy must ours be, without God and without Christ!" "Ah!" said the other, "that thought struck me too." They went up to God's house, heard God's Word, they came home and bent their knee in prayer, and to their surprise they found that the rest of the family had done the same, and that the God who had never answered their father's prayer in his life had answered it after his death, and by his death too, and by such a death as would appear to be most unlikely to have wrought the conversion of any. Pray on, then, my sister; pray on, my brother! God shall yet bring thy sons and daughters to his love and fear, and thou shalt rejoice over them in heaven, if thou never dost on earth."

We could consider many more applications of the principle that suffering precedes glory but we must move on. I would only admonish you to ever keep such a truth in mind so you may fortify yourselves against becoming disappointed with God. We've seen, then, that one of the causes of such disappointment is traceable to defective understanding. Would you consider next that when the Lord disappoints you:

## II. It is Because Your Attitude Needs Adjusting

Our case study here focuses on the prophet Jonah. You know the story. Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh. If you know much about the wickedness of Nineveh then you probably wouldn't blame Jonah for his reluctance to visit that ungodly place. He would have been quite happy to give the place over to God's judgment and when he learned through a long and hard experience that would take him to the bottom of the mountains in the depths of the sea that salvation is of the Lord he found the grace to take on an unappealing assignment.

But even upon executing his assignment he had high hopes that his message would be rejected. He certainly is an unusual preacher in that regard isn't he? How many preachers travel anywhere to preach with the hope that they won't be received and their message will be rejected? But alas for Jonah – his theology proved to be correct. The theology of Jonah is given to us in a very concise but somewhat comprehensive statement in Jonah 4:2 *And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, [was] not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou [art] a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.*

It's interesting to note here in passing that Jonah's message did not focus on this theology. His message was a message of judgment – *yet 40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown*. But he recognized the grace and mercy and kindness of God even in the proclamation of such a message and so he didn't want to preach it but tried to flee instead. You know the story – Jonah did preach the message and the inhabitants of Nineveh responded to it with very impressive repentance from the least to the greatest of them with

sackcloth and ashes and the city was spared from judgment and Jonah was disappointed with God. *I do well to be angry, even unto death* we find him saying in 4:9.

I think we could label Jonah's disappointment with God as the disappointment of the hyper-Calvinist. And by hyper-Calvinist I refer to those Calvinists that are of the opinion that God so loves the elect and hates the non-elect with the end result that the hyper-Calvinist hates the non-elect also.

I use to think that such issues were a matter of theological hair-splitting. But I have since come to recognize that such an issue has a very direct bearing upon our Christian lives and especially our Christian witness. How can we, as Christians, be expected to care for something that we think God doesn't care about?

The truth that comes out of this chapter in Jonah is that God does care about souls. The ending to the book of Jonah is very telling in that regard. Listen to the last two verses of Jonah 4 - *Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?* The reference to sixscore thousand persons that could not discern between their right hand and their left hand is generally thought by commentators to be a reference to children.

And from this example and other examples, not the least of which is Christ weeping over Jerusalem, we may infer that God does have compassion on lost souls and God takes no pleasure in the condemnation of lost souls. Ezekiel is instructed by God in Eze 33:11 to *Say unto them, [As] I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?*

The thing that brings Calvinism into reproach among non-Calvinists is the perception conveyed by those Calvinists that God doesn't care about the non-elect. A very telling title to a book that criticizes Calvinism is the title: *What Love is This?- Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God.*

The sad thing about those who lodge these kinds of criticisms against Calvinists is that they have to set aside the plain teaching of Scripture in order to hold their criticisms. They make for easy targets for Calvinists grounded in the word of God to refute but that does not take away from the issue that if your theology leads you to a lack of compassion for lost souls and even the non-elect, then your theology has not served you well and you, like Jonah, are in need of an attitude adjustment.

What we've already covered in my first point, I suppose, could apply here as well – there is a defective understanding about God in such cases. We error who think that we can fit God into the tiny capacity of our finite understanding. His ways are above our ways and his thoughts higher than our thoughts. And we must guard ourselves against denying the truth of his sovereignty and his ultimacy in order to affirm an emotional issue. By the same

token we must not allow our theology to dismiss the plainly revealed attitude of God toward souls. He is sovereign in salvation and he desires that all men everywhere repent and believe the truth of Christ.

And where we fail to understand and appreciate God's love and God's concern for the lost we will find ourselves, like Jonah, developing judgmental attitudes toward others, attitudes that not only fail to represent God correctly but indeed bring reproach to the name of God and the name of Christ.

God is very longsuffering with souls – much more so than we are. I can remember many years ago while I was still in the ranks of the Baptists that there was a family that had a falling out with the Baptist church I was attending. The man had been ordained to the ministry through this church and I think the trauma of a failed attempt to plant a church made him bitter. The church officers responded to his harsh letters by informing him that he was in danger of having his ordination revoked if he continued in his harshness. The man responded by tearing up his ordination papers and then mailing them back to the church. It was very apparent that he was not going to allow this church to have any leverage over him.

The Pastor of the church responded by expressing his fear that God was going to judge this man and his family. To my knowledge no judgment ever took place. I'm reminded by this incident and by the story of Jonah how the disciples once asked Christ if they thought it would be appropriate for them to call down fire from heaven to consume the city of Samaria. Do you remember Christ's response? We read in Lu 9:55 *But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.*

Wasn't that the case with Jonah? Could not that have been the case with this Baptist Pastor? How often does it prove to be the case with us when God doesn't do what we think he should do, when we think he should do it in the way in which we think he should do it.

We become disappointed with God ultimately because God doesn't hearken to our beckoning call. Or, in other words, God does not become subservient to us. The best way, therefore, to avoid becoming disappointed with God is to let God be God and take your place before his throne as his humble servant.

He is good. He is gracious. You know it to be so if you're saved today. He's been good and gracious to you. He is also faithful to his promises and all powerful to honor his promises. And so our place is at his feet, humbly pleading his promises and patiently waiting on him. May the Lord help us to occupy the right place before him. May we find grace to never give up on those for whom we've been praying. May we bide God's time and by faith affirm that God will move in accordance with his wisdom in answer to the prayers of his people in the fashion that will most bring glory to his name. And may we find ourselves being compassionate and longsuffering even as these attributes reflect God himself.