

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*When Jesus Doesn't Meet Our Expectations.*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse and we find ourselves at **Luke 7:18**.

We're going to be looking at John the Baptist, but we haven't seen him for a while. So we're going to back up to review a little. Please turn to **Luke 3:18**. This is the last time we saw John in Luke's Gospel...

Luke 3:18 And with many other exhortations [John] preached to the people. ¹⁹ But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, ²⁰ also added this, above all, that [Herod] shut John up in prison.

Herod began a relationship w/ **Herodias** who happened to be his niece and his half-brother **Philip's wife**. In the process **Herod** left his wife and Herodias left her husband **Philip**.

John rebuked **Herod** for all this, and it says **for all the [other] evils [Herod] had done**. As a result, Herod threw John in prison. And that's presented as even one more evil Herod committed.

So John finds himself in prison, and while he's in prison he becomes very confused about Jesus. Now you can look at **Luke 7:18**...

¹⁸ **Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things.**

Even after John was imprisoned he was able to hear about Jesus from his disciples; John's disciples acted as messengers keeping him updated on the Messiah's ministry.

And it says these messengers told him about **all these things** Jesus had been doing. The way **these things** is written, it's clearly referring to the previous accounts:

- He heard about Jesus healing the Roman centurion's servant with a word in **verses 1-10**.
- He heard about Jesus raising the widow of Nain's son from the dead. If you look at **verse 17** it says **this report about Him** (about Jesus raising the son) **went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region**.

So of course John heard about this, and what do you think he was thinking? Why would this news be somewhat difficult for him? He's thinking:

- *Why is Jesus helping all these other people, but He's not helping me?*
- *He raises a woman's son from the dead, but he leaves me in prison?*

So John did something you wouldn't believe if it wasn't written in Scripture. Look at **verse 19**...

¹⁹ **And John, calling two of his disciples to him** (more than likely John asked for **two** b/c the Law demanded matters be established by at least two witnesses), **sent them to Jesus, saying, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"**

THIS is crazy! Consider what we're reading! You have John the Baptist questioning whether Jesus is the Messiah!

Now just to make sure we appreciate how truly unbelievable this is, let me get you to think of a few things...

When Mary was pregnant with Jesus and Elizabeth was pregnant with John, these two women met. It was one of the most unique moments in history. **Luke 1:41** says, **“And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that [John] leaped in [Elizabeth’s] womb.”**

Even as an unborn baby John somehow recognized Jesus!

Then, when Jesus' public ministry began, He went to John to be baptized and listen to this...

Matt 3:14 John *tried to prevent* [Jesus], saying, **“I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?”**

John was actually reluctant to baptize Jesus b/c he knew He was the Messiah and he thought it should be the other way around.

When he did baptize Jesus it says...

Matt 3:16b Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon [Jesus]. ¹⁷ And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, **“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”**

If there was any question in John's mind before - whether Jesus was the Messiah or not - He had two dramatic affirmations from the other Persons of the Trinity to confirm Jesus' Messiahship:

- One from the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove.
- One from God the Father, hearing His voice ring out.

It would be hard to argue that anyone in history up to this point had more reason to believe Jesus was the Messiah than John.

And listen to a few things John said about Jesus after this:

- **John 1:15** John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, **“This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.’”**
- **John 1:29** John...said, **“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**
- **John 1:35** Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples (as if it wasn't enough to say it once). ³⁶ **And looking at Jesus...he said, “Behold the Lamb of God!”**

So the point is if anyone knew Jesus was the Messiah, it was John.

In **Luke 3:16** John said, **“One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”**

Speaking of Jesus, John said, *“One mightier than me is coming.”*

But now you see so much has changed he sends messengers to Jesus saying, *“Are you really that mightier One that’s coming?”*

So here’s the obvious question...

- Why is John having these doubts?
- How could the forerunner of the Messiah – of all people – be wondering this?

I don’t think there’s one specific thing that affected John. I think it was the culmination of a number of things, and I’m going to try to point out those things individually.

One reason I want to do this is it gives us a clearer understanding of who the Messiah is and what He primarily wanted to do in His First Coming.

LESSON 1: JOHN WAS STRUGGLING BECAUSE JESUS DIDN’T MEET HIS EXPECTATIONS AS: (PART I) KING

Go ahead and turn to **Luke 3:3**

Luke 3:3 And [John] went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, ⁴ as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying:

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the LORD;

Make His paths straight.

⁵ **Every valley shall be filled**

And every mountain and hill brought low;

The crooked places shall be made straight

And the rough ways smooth;

⁶ **And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”**

This is what you say when you’re preparing people for a king’s arrival. This is what people did for kings when they came.

So here’s the question: how much was Jesus looking like a king?

Jesus wasn’t showing any signs of being the political leader or conquering Messiah that John – and most of the Jews – expected.

And one other point that might not be as obvious to us, but more than likely would’ve been obvious to John...

- If John expected Jesus to be king, can you guess where he would've expected Jesus' ministry to take place? If the Messiah is going to be a reigning king, where will He be? Around – or in – what kingly city? Jerusalem. That's the City of David; the city of kings. That's where kings reign. Every king of Judah is associated w/ Jerusalem.
- But up to this point, Jesus has been in one part of Israel almost entirely. Any guesses? Galilee, which was very NOT kingly. I don't want to sound harsh, but Galilee is viewed as sort of a Podunk town. Far from the capital of the nation, which is where the educated, upper-class people were. Galilee was lower-class and un-kingly.

But Galilee is also where Jesus was spending his time, and Galileans were the people He was associating with and choosing as disciples. He was not choosing the prominent, powerful people a king would choose.

So you might be wondering what exactly the verses are about...

They're not talking about a King coming and physically ruling over the land. The verses are about a King coming and spiritually ruling in our hearts.

- Did Jesus literally want a bunch of roads prepared for Him?
- No, but He did want a bunch of hearts prepared for Him!
 - **Make His paths straight** means make paths straight to our hearts.
 - **Every valley shall be filled** means get rid of the self-pity.
 - **Every mountain and hill brought low** means get rid of the pride.
 - **The crooked places shall be made straight** means be honest.
 - **The rough ways smooth** we all have **rough edges** that need to be **smoothed** out.

So that's what's ultimately in view in these verses, and perhaps John lost sight of that.

The other thing a King needs is a Kingdom...

In **Matt 3:2** John said, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!**"

John said the Kingdom of heaven is near. It's about to be established. It will be set up at any moment.

Now if you thought this Kingdom was physical, which is what many people thought...

- Did it look like this Kingdom was near?
- How close did it look to being established?

It didn't look close at all. The kingdom at the time was Rome and it didn't look at all close to being overthrown.

The best way to understand the Kingdom Jesus WAS bringing is by considering a few verses later in Luke...

Luke 17:20 [Jesus] was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation;^{21a} nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!'

Why would Jesus say you can't look **here** or **there** to see the Kingdom of God?

- Because it's not a physical Kingdom.
- He was establishing a spiritual kingdom.

Right after that He said...

21b For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."

It's a kingdom that's in our hearts. We enter it by faith in Christ. That's how – or when – we become part of Christ's Kingdom and He becomes our King, or Lord.

Another way John struggled...

LESSON 1: JOHN WAS STRUGGLING BECAUSE JESUS DIDN'T MEET HIS EXPECTATIONS AS (PART II) JUDGE.

When John the Baptist came on the scene and started preparing the way for the Messiah, how did he describe Jesus' ministry? If you had to give the main idea of what he said Jesus would do, what comes to mind? He said Jesus would...

- Judge!
- Punish!

In **Matt 3:12** John said, **"His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."**

How did the Messiah sound? He sounds terrifying!

Look at **Luke 3:7**...

Luke 3:7 Then [John] said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, **"Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as *our* father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. ⁹ And even now (and this is referring to Jesus coming...) the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."**

Listen to the response of the people...

¹⁰ **So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?"**

They were afraid when they asked this. You can imagine them saying this trembling that they're going to be judged.

So John thought...

- The Messiah would come w/ judgment and punishment.
- He was going to be chopping them down and throwing them into the fire.

And here's the question...

- Up until now has there been much judgment or punishment in Jesus' ministry?
- Has He been a vengeful, wrath-filled Individual?
- Has He been behaving in a way many people would be terrified of Him?

No! It's actually the opposite!

- The worst sinners are comfortable approaching Him.
- He's performing acts of grace and mercy.
- He's preaching forgiveness and love.

John brought a really strong message of judgment and condemnation, but the Messiah seemed to bring a really strong message of love and forgiveness.

Even listen to these two verses Jesus said about Himself...

- **John 3:17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.**
- **John 12:47b I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.**

Jesus said He didn't come to **condemn** or **judge**.

So how do we reconcile what John said about Jesus with what Jesus said about Himself?

- The answer is Jesus was describing the purpose of His First Coming.
- In Jesus' First Coming He wasn't coming to judge or condemn.
- He was coming to save and forgive.

But here's the thing...

Just b/c Jesus didn't come to judge in His First Coming doesn't mean He won't judge at all!

One commentator I like – William Hendriksen – said, *“What [John] failed to discern [is] that this prophecy of doom would go into fulfillment not now but at Christ's second coming.”*

Listen to these two other verses Jesus said about Himself...

- In **John 5:22** Jesus said, **“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son.”**
- **John 5:27 [The Father] has given [the Son] authority to execute judgment.”**

Jesus will actually judge everyone. Believer and unbeliever alike will stand before Him. And that's why John told everyone they needed to repent, b/c at some point everyone will face Jesus, and we will all face Him either as Savior or Judge.

BUT in His First Coming He came to be our Savior and I suspect this was confusing to John after preaching such a strong message of judgment.

And a third way Jesus probably didn't meet John's expectations...

LESSON 1: JOHN WAS STRUGGLING BECAUSE JESUS DIDN'T MEET HIS EXPECTATIONS AS: (PART III) REDEEMER.

Let's turn to **Luke 2:36**. Here's the context...

Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the temple as an infant, and they ran into a prophetess named Anna. Look at **verse 37**...

³⁷ **and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.** ³⁸ **And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who (and this is the important part...) looked for redemption in Jerusalem.**

So Anna was speaking to all the Jews who were looking forward to Israel being redeemed. And here's the question...

What sort of redemption were the Jews expecting? Physical or spiritual?

- Were they expecting a physical redemption from Rome?
- Or were they expecting a spiritual redemption from their sins?

They were expecting a physical redemption from Rome!

Let me briefly show you one more passage. Please turn to **Luke 24**. Here's the context...

This is Resurrection Sunday...the very first one! Jesus was crucified 3 days earlier. Now He's walking on the road to Emmaus w/ two individuals. Look at **verse 16**...

16 But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.

Most other translations say, "**They were kept from recognizing Him.**" It doesn't mean He was invisible to them, but it means they didn't know who He was.

They were both really upset, b/c of Jesus' death. Look at **verse 17**...

17 And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?"

Jesus is asking, "*What are you talking about that has you so upset?*"

¹⁸ Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, “Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?”

Basically **Cleopas** said, “*You must be the only person in the whole land who has no idea Jesus was crucified!*”

It’s a pretty ironic situation, and it gets even better...

^{19a} And He said to them, “What things?”

It’s always amused me Jesus said this to them. I don’t want to be irreverent, but it almost looks like Jesus is playing w/ them! To me, this is something I’d do, and Katie would elbow me and tell me to stop.

^{19b} So they said to Him, “The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth (Duh!), who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,²⁰ and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. (Now notice this...) ²¹ But we were hoping that it was He WHO WAS GOING TO REDEEM ISRAEL.

Now that is crazy! They thought He hadn’t redeemed Israel! He was crucified and resurrected, showing His victory over sin and death, which means He provided our redemption.

But they thought He hadn’t redeemed Israel, b/c...

- They thought He would redeem Israel physically from the Romans.
- Not spiritually from sin and death.

The reason I mention this is I suspect John was making the same mistake. He was wondering when Rome would be overthrown.

And the last part of Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: JOHN WAS STRUGGLING BECAUSE JESUS DIDN’T MEET HIS EXPECTATIONS AS: (PART IV) DELIVERER.

Let me briefly tell you about the prison John was in...

Josephus – the great Jewish historian – said John was imprisoned and executed in Machaerus. It sounded like a miserable place to be kept. One commentator said Machaerus was “*a terrible, deep, and hot dungeon.*”

I suspect prison is difficult for anyone, but it might have been particularly rough on John for two reasons:

1. First, he had been accustomed to a wilderness lifestyle. Now he finds himself confined to this dismal place.

2. Second, I'm sure he wanted to be out serving the Lord, since He was the forerunner.

But when John was in prison, there's one thing that must have been a great encouragement to him...

- He must've been encouraged by the prophecies about the Messiah.
- In particular he must've been encouraged by something Jesus said He would do.

Please look at **Luke 4:18**.

Here's the context for this verse...

Jesus returned to His hometown of Nazareth and He's going to read from **Isaiah 61**. This is a prophecy Jesus read about Himself...

Luke 4:18 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to *the* poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO *THE* CAPTIVES
And recovery of sight to *the* blind,
TO SET AT LIBERTY THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED;

If I had to choose just one verse in all of Scripture that summarized the Messiah's ministry, it would be this verse.

And let me get you to notice two parts of it. Jesus said He would...

- **Proclaim liberty to the captives...**
- **Set at liberty those who are oppressed...**

Now do you think John was thinking about these words when he was in prison? Of course! He can't wait for Jesus to deliver him.

And this prophecy isn't the only one in the OT about prisoners being delivered. Listen to this...

- **Psalm 46:7b The LORD gives freedom to the prisoners.**
- **Isa 42:7b To bring out prisoners from prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.**

And nobody looked more like a prisoner than John. He's a perfect candidate for being delivered under the Messiah's ministry. And not only that, he's the Messiah's forerunner. So...

- If there's anyone the Messiah should release...
- If there's anyone who should be out there ministering...

It's John the Baptist!

Based then something happened...or you could say something DIDN'T happen...

- John wasn't being released.
- The days kept stretching on...and on...and on.

Finally, it even reached the point where he started wondering if Jesus was actually the Messiah at all.

But here's the question...

Jesus was going to deliver people, but would it be a physical deliverance or a spiritual deliverance?

- He wasn't going to deliver people from physical imprisonment.
- But He was going to deliver people from sin and death.

So back to our original question...

Why did John send **two of his disciples [to ask] Jesus, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"**

I think it was a combination of all these expectations John had, and Jesus didn't seem to be meeting them.

Now I think there's a lot of application for us, because...

- Who else can be like John?
- Who else can have expectations of Jesus that we don't feel like He's meeting at times?
- Who else can be confused by what Jesus is – or isn't – doing in our lives?

Us!

And this brings us to Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: WE CAN MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE AS JOHN WHEN JESUS DOESN'T MEET OUR EXPECTATIONS.

As I was studying the reasons John was having this struggle, I realized we struggle for the same reasons.

Look back w/ me at **LESSON 1, PART I**...

John was frustrated that Jesus wasn't the King He expected Him to be. He wasn't ruling and reigning the way John expected – and I'm sure wanted Him – to rule and reign.

Jesus isn't physically w/ us now like He was in John's day, but we still know He's King, and sometimes it upsets us that He isn't ruling and reigning the way we'd want.

This seems to happen especially when we look at the leaders the Lord allows – or appoints – to rule over us.

For example, we're in an election season, and who are we looking at as candidates? Clinton and Trump. We're thinking:

- *Why doesn't God give us a godly ruler?*
- *Doesn't He want us to have someone w/ integrity and humility ruling over us?*

It can be frustrating. We wonder why the Lord isn't meeting our expectations.

But it's almost like we forget...

- We're the ones who vote for these people.
- We're the ones who are part of a nation...
 - That keeps increasing our debt by trillions of dollars...
 - That loves murdering babies...
 - That celebrates homosexual marriage.

That's not God's fault.

We don't look like a Christian nation. Why should we expect a Christian president?

Look at LESSON 1, PART II...

John was frustrated that Jesus wasn't judging – or punishing – people the way he thought He should.

I think we can easily look out and see some amount of evil taking place, and what do we wonder?

- *Why is the Lord letting this happen?*
- *Why isn't the Lord punishing those people who are responsible?*
- *The Lord is holy and just, so why does it seem like these people get away with all this wickedness?*

I think that bothered John, and it can bother us too.

But in John's day, the Lord was giving people time to repent, and in our day the Lord is giving people time to repent.

I'll say that I'm very glad the Lord was so patient w/ me in giving me time to repent.

And if you look at **PARTS III AND IV OF LESSON 1**, I think you see what was most difficult for John...and what is often most difficult for us.

- John wasn't being redeemed or delivered the way he expected.
- And I think it's hard for us when we feel like the Lord isn't redeeming or delivering us from our trials the way we expect.

Sometimes we have trouble harmonizing our faith w/ the circumstances in our lives. Let me say that one more time: we have trouble harmonizing our faith w/ the circumstances in our lives.

We say:

- *If the Lord is real...*
- *If the Lord loves me...*
- *If I'm really a child of God...*

Then...

- *Why hasn't He done this or that for me?*
- *Or why is He allowing this or that in my life?*

For example, we might say...

- *Why hasn't He found me a spouse yet?*
- *Why won't He allow us to have a child, or another child?*
- *Why did He let my loved one experience this disease?*
- *Why is He letting us struggle financially?*

Sometimes when we're going through very difficult circumstances – like John was when he was in prison – it can affect us spiritually...like it affected John spiritually.

- We have expectations Jesus is going to come and rescue us...
- Like John had expectations Jesus was going to come and rescue him.

But I think we need to do the same thing John needed to do:

- We need to think about why Jesus came, and it wasn't to deliver us from all every difficult, physical circumstance.
- We need to remember He came for spiritual reasons.

Maybe John briefly lost sight of this truth, but early on He made a statement that could be the very best summary verse describing why Jesus came:

- **John 1:29** John said Jesus is, **"The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"**
- **1 John 3:5a** **You know that He was manifested** (referring to His First Coming) **to take away our sins.**

That's why Jesus came!

- He didn't come to redeem us or deliver us from every difficult physical circumstance.
- But...
 - He did come to redeem us from sin.
 - He did come to deliver us from hell.

Let me give you an illustration that I hope you can take w/ you...

In this morning's passage we saw a man in prison, and he was struggling. Can you think of another man – or two men – who were in prison, but they weren't struggling?

Acts 16:25 **At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.**

Now why were these two singing?

- Is it b/c the prison they were in was so comfortable?
- Is it b/c their physical circumstances were so great?

No, it's b/c they were focused on the spiritual.

So let me close by asking you this question...

- Who are we going to be like while in the physical prisons of our lives? A Paul or a John?

- Will we seek to grow spiritually and understand that Christ did not come to save us from all our physical distresses but that He came to save us spiritually?

Paul had a profound grasp of this, and hopefully we can be encouraged by his example.

If we're like Paul, then we'll never feel like Jesus isn't meeting our expectations. Instead, we'll be overwhelmed with how much Jesus exceeds our expectation.

Let's pray.