

Great Expectations

"I am my beloved's and he is mine/ His banner over me is love."

Back in the day when we sang choruses in worship services, I loved the repetitive recitation of words of truth. The tribe of Jesus follows His banner of love. What a powerful lyric and melody to play in our mind on an endless loop.

But while I may sing about the Lord's banner, I've lived much of my life following the banner of expectations. Sometimes, I catch myself singing one thing and doing another. I sang a melancholy tune because I failed to meet expectations:

In a home of "I expected more of you."

In attempts to please professors in graduate school.

In front of a classroom full of students when I tried to be funny.

In putting work before family for too many years.

In remaining lower when Jesus called me higher.

Joyce Meyer said it well: "Many people feel so pressured by the expectations of others that it causes them to be frustrated, miserable and confused about what they should do." Isn't that true? Sometimes we don't know whom to disappoint next.

During my time as a pastor, I frequently asked people in the church parking lot or lobby what they expected from the service. The answers were almost always consumption focused. On their way in the door, people didn't speak as folks who had something to give as ministers.

Is it harsh to think we often approach our seats in the

sanctuary with selfish motives? How much more effectively could congregations serve if all attendees served? But many people come to church with an empty cup.

I've learned that man can never expect of me what God expects. He expects me to do His will and love people, to take up my cross and die daily. And I know in my heart that God moves far beyond what man can expect or imagine. Consider Acts 3 and the story of the lame man:

"Peter, gazing at him [the lame man] with John, said 'Look at us.' So he paid attention to them, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, 'I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk'" (vv. 4-6).

Do you think it's possible the lame man was disappointed because the apostles added no coins to his cup? Sometimes "stuff" matters more than spiritual impartation. Certainly, after he was healed, the man walked and danced in the streets. Was the healed beggar able to change his expectations? The lame beggar did not wake up that glorious morning and expect to walk. Instead, he expected to receive gold or silver in his cup. Aren't we excited when the Lord gives us more than we expect?

What did the disciples expect from the man? They only asked him to "Look at us." The beggar probably didn't hear this request often. As I've walked the streets of New York City and passed beggars on the way, few if any of them made eye contact. But the disciples made it a point for the lame man to look at them. Their ministry was to the whole man, not simply to his can.

This story of miraculous healing offers a powerful lesson. What we expect from man fits in the can. But our expectation of eternal life is built on nothing less than "Jesus' blood and righteousness." Look closely at the healed beggar's story:

“[Peter] took him by the right hand and raised him up. Immediately his feet and ankles were strengthened. Jumping up, he stood and walked and entered the temple with them, walking and jumping and praising God. All the people saw him walking and praising God. They knew that it was he who sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what happened to him” (Acts 3:7-10).

The disciples watched as their new friend walked and jumped and praised God. They expected him to walk. They carried the banner of Jesus.

And the people saw the same man with wide-eyed wonder. They had never expected to see him walk. They carried the banner of man.

Christ brought us to His banqueting table with a banner of love. As we carry the banner of Jesus throughout our walk on earth, let us love more—and expect less from others. {eo}

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