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HAVING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Matthew 11:1-15

One Main Thing

“Expectation is the root of all heartache.” (Attributed to) Shakespeare. We need to have realistic expectations of what our life will be like as a Christian. People who expect one thing and receive something different often become disillusioned and give up. Giving up is something a Christian must never do.

Introduction

One major goal of premarital counseling is to get the couple to have realistic expectations of what their lifelong commitment will look like. If you expect marriage to be a 24 hour per day/seven day per week thrill ride of love and blissful wonderfulness, you may end up being very surprised. Marriage is actually a lot like real life. In fact, it is exactly like real life. When some of that real life sets in on a newlywed couple that

expected a “happily ever after” fairy tale, something bad is the inevitable result. Divorce is often the tragic end of that scenario, and the cause is unrealistic expectations that were held at the beginning.

Many Christians fall away because Christianity does not turn out to be what they thought when they originally made their lifelong commitment. When you became “clothed in Christ,” you may have thought, “Okay, everything is going to be better from here on out!” If you did, you are not alone. Most new Christians feel that way. Christianity, however, is a lot like real life, and when real life sets in, we have to be ready to stand by Christ in the good times and the bad.



It is easy to have false expectations of what Jesus will do for us. There is an episode in the life of John the Baptist where he appears to struggle with his expectations of Jesus. In Matt 3:1-10, John is preaching that justice is about to be served and the “coming wrath” will soon break on the enemies of God. John expected Jesus to be the deliverer of Israel and he is very excited to see it happen. However, a little later as John is wasting away in prison (Matt 11:2), this “Messiah” is preaching around the countryside, healing people, and taking boat rides. John begins to question his assumptions. He starts to wonder if this is the Messiah after all and then sends messengers to Jesus asking, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” (Matt 11:3).

The obvious question that seems to follow is, "If you are the 'Coming One,' then why am I about to die here in this prison?"

Interpretation

John probably asked, "Are you the one we were expecting?" Jesus had failed to meet their expectations. John, like every Jew, was looking for a "Messiah" who as king and military leader would crush the Romans and drive them out of Israel, restoring Israel to the great nation it was long ago. John must have thought Jesus was going to restore Israel to its former glory and that he (John) would be restored also. When that failed to happen, doubt crept in. John knows that Jesus is the Messiah in Matt 3. However, by chapter 11 John is having serious doubts spring up because his circumstances did not meet his expectations. It is easy to see why John begins to wonder if Jesus was "The Coming One" as he waits to die in his Roman prison cell. What John expects does not match his reality.

Application

It sounds incredibly harsh, but we have high expectations of Jesus and of what Christianity will do for us. Sometimes those expectations are disappointed. Our expectations are usually disappointed because of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. In a small place in our hearts (and sometimes in a large place), we expect that if we believe and live right, we will have

You may live a life of ease, and everything may be wonderful everyday of your life after you become a Christian. Or you may suffer. It may be hard to be a Christian some days. You may be tortured like many were in the first century. Peter was beaten and jailed (Acts 5:41). We do not often suffer now as Christians, but that does not mean we will not or that we cannot. We may be called to suffer from time to time. We may be called to endure hardship with an unwavering faith like Job in the Bible (Jas 5:11).

In a lot of ways, Christianity calls you to do hard things:

- ~ Study God's Word
- ~ Be involved in evangelism
- ~ Become a part of a church, attend, and take part in worship
- ~ Love people, even the ones that are hard to love
- ~ Avoid sin and do not do the things you did before you became a Christian
- ~ Do not retaliate when you are insulted
- ~ Forgive

Conclusion

God never promised to give us our reward in this life. He does promise to reward us in the next life. We want both and expect both, but that is not the arranged deal.

Heaven is a place of rest. This is a place of work, and work is not always easy. Revelation 22:12 says, "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." God has expectations for us also. He expects us to trust Him and to obey Him in this life. If we do, He has a reward waiting for us that is beyond our comprehension. God calls us to a life of challenge, not a life of ease.

Do not expect to become a Christian and have everything magically become easier. It may, but it may also get much, much harder. Life did get harder for the early Christians.

Have realistic expectations of Christianity so that you never quit and that you receive the actual reward that is promised to you (Gal 6:5). Starting with Eve, it has always been the devil's game to create false expectations. We will receive the reward if we do not give up. In times of great disappointment or pain, we should turn toward our God, not away.

Rodney Dangerfield once joked that he and his wife were happy for 20 years, and then they met. Despite all the jokes and cynicism, marriage is a truly beautiful and rewarding life. If both partners are committed to each other and faithful to their vows, there are rewards to being married that are inexpressibly wonderful! There will still be good times and bad. Comparably, when you are baptized, you make a lifelong vow of faithfulness much like putting on a wedding ring. You may not live

happily ever after but the reward of being a Christian is that you will live happily in the “hereafter” (Rev 21:4).

Discussion

1. Does the Bible teach that we will never suffer as a Christian? Why do we get mad at God when we do suffer (Rom 5:3; Jas 1:2; 1 Pet 3:14)?
2. What does Paul mean in Rom 8:18?
3. In Gen 3, how does the serpent play with Eve’s expectations? What emotions do you think lead Adam and Eve to hide? Compare what we should do with what we often do after we sin (1 John 1:9; Acts 8:24; John 7:38–50; 8–11).
4. How have your expectations of what Christianity was going to be like been different than your reality? Have your expectations of other Christians ever been disappointed?
5. When we get married, we get a license, have a ceremony, exchange vows and sometimes rings. When we commit our life to Christ, what do we do (Acts 2:38; 8:29–39; Gal 3:27)?
6. Have people’s expectations of Jesus’ return been disappointed (2 Pet 3:3–7)?