

MATTHEW 16:21-28  
EXPECTATIONS OVERTURNED

Expectations are everywhere! Two people are getting married have expectations of their marriage; given that men are from Mars and women are from Venus, these expectations can be wildly different and they need to talk about them! We have expectations of a new job, or a new school, or being retired – we have a picture in our heads of what that experience will look like and feel like when we get there for the first time. We have expectations of our football team, or rugby team at the start of a new season, that this season will be better than the last! We have expectations of church: church will be a super, fantastic experience, and will add so much value to our lives. Expectations are everywhere. We have expectations of each other and how we will behave towards each other, with love, care, kindness, and generosity. We have expectations of ourselves, that we will be good people and that we will react in the right way to all of the situations of our lives. We have expectations of God – what will these be? That he will answer all of our prayers, instantly?

What happens when these expectations are overturned? There are two ways in which that can happen: first of all, our expectations can be exceeded, that the reality is far-and-away better than anything we could have expected, your team wins the league, people far kinder and much more generous than we could ever have imagined, the job is far better and so on. That's a huge delight to us and we're glad. The second way in which our expectations are overturned is in exactly the opposite direction: the reality falls far short! Our team is relegated! We have expected people to be kind and caring, but they are the exact opposite, rude, violent, they don't treat us as the unique human beings that we are, they ignore us; that happens in churches too! So we are disappointed; what we had expected would be so good, becomes disappointing and difficult. Even God, at times, seems to let us down; our prayers seem to go unanswered; He is not there anymore and we are left to muddle on. Our expectations have been overturned.

Today's Bible story is full of expectations and the more I've looked at it the more there are; we have to ignore some in order to focus on just two. We see Peter's expectation of Jesus; and Jesus' expectation of Peter and His disciples. That conversation between Jesus and Peter becomes a conversation which we overhear, but then becomes a conversation into which we are drawn and in which we then take part. It becomes a conversation about our expectations of Jesus and His expectations of us. All of it, in one way or another, becomes focussed on the cross.

*Peter's expectation of Jesus:* Last week, in the first part of this conversation, Peter had declared "You are..." (*Matthew 16:16*) The Messiah is here. Nothing of what that means is unpacked in that conversation, but we know what the Jews expected of Messiah. It was partly fuelled by Old Testament prophecies of the day when the Messiah would come and what that would look like, a vision that was given shape by the fact that Israel now was an occupied nation and the Jews were an oppressed people. Their expectation of Messiah was that a great King would come, a warrior who would gather a great army and march at the head of this army into his city, Jerusalem, and throw out the oppressors and the invaders and make Israel free again. He would ride his great war horse and the glory days of Israel would reappear and they would be a great nation again. Some might take it further into a vision of a new heaven and a new earth that God would bring when the Messiah comes. When Peter confesses Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, that is the expectation in his mind; that is what he sees in his mind's eye; that is what he hopes will come to pass.

When you first came across this Jesus, what was your expectation of Him? Maybe didn't put it into words, but there must have been something to draw you to Him. Was it the expectation that He would make everything better for all of your life? One touch and miracles would happen for you. Or, here was someone who would answer your prayers and give you your heart's

desire every day. Or, here was someone who would understand you and what life is like for you, what is hard, and someone who would walk with you through these hard times? Or, here is someone who would forgive that sense of guilt and failure? Some of these are intensely personal expectations and some are good expectations; the challenge for us is to have these expectations shaped by what the Bible teaches.

*“From that...” (Matthew 16:21)* For Jesus, “it was necessary that” this was the road He would walk. It was a very different road from the one Peter had imagined and Peter found it hard to take. *“Never!” (Matthew 16:22)* Peter’s expectations are overturned because Jesus has a very different sense of the direction in which His life is heading, clearly focussed on suffering and death and the cross. For Jesus, the Messiah was not about glory and power; for Jesus, the Messiah sent by God to save world was all about suffering and death. There were straws in wind, opposition and threat from His enemies and that was very real. The other very real way of seeing the cross was as the path set out for Him, God’s way to save the world. The Bible holds both of these together with ease, that the cross is both something Jesus’ enemies did and something that was set out for Him by God. Whatever expectation Peter might have now of Jesus, it was not where he started; that had been overturned and now Peter was challenged to see Jesus, the Messiah, on the cross, the Saviour of the world.

The cross was not some accident that God overturned for good; the cross was the reason for Jesus coming. Isaiah 53 looks forward very powerfully to the Servant of the Lord who would suffer and die for the sake of others: *“He was...” (Isaiah 53:5)* and Jesus completed that picture. Or, in New Testament terms: *“the message...” (1 Corinthians 1:18)* At the heart of the Church, at the heart of the Christian faith, stands Jesus who suffered and died and was raised and this is our Saviour. He died that we might be forgiven; He shares our pain when we suffer and He walks with us when we the walk dark paths of suffering and grief and death. Expect this Jesus to save you completely, to bring you grace, to understand you, to have compassion on you. Peter learned to expect these things of Jesus; do we too? These are changed expectations.

*Jesus’ expectation of Peter:* being a disciple is also cross-shaped. *“If anyone...” (Matthew 16:24)* We talk about having our crosses to bear: an irritable husband, a cantankerous wife, some personal affliction – these are our crosses to bear. But that is not what Jesus is talking about here. When the disciples saw someone carrying a cross it meant only one thing, the person was going to die, was going to the place of crucifixion, just as Jesus did Himself some months later. Jesus tells His disciples that there is a death to die, spiritually, metaphorically, in order to be His followers. Maybe they had an expectation that Jesus would be with them for a long time to come and that they would inherit His Kingdom and rule the world forever, and share in His glory. Instead, His expectation of them is that they too will carry a cross; there is a death to die.

Who rules my life? Ego! Some people have an over-inflated sense of ego and it shows! They are masters of their own universe, masters of their own destiny, they’d like to think. In smaller ways, all of us are same. We make choices on basis of what we want to do, what we like to do, what pleases me! When my choice that pleases me comes into conflict with your choice and what pleases you, that is a recipe for conflict. Two egos come up against each other and that is a recipe for conflict. The tension between the USA and North Korea is not altogether political; it comes from two overblown egos! The challenge Jesus puts in front of us is to die to ego - *“Whoever wants...” (Matthew 16:25)* No longer should it be ego who rules my life, but Jesus; the basic Christian confession of faith from the very beginning is “Jesus is Lord” and what does that mean, but that Jesus is the one who rules my life; listen to Jesus and let His teaching guide me; let His example shape my attitudes and the way I behave.

“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die” (Bonhoeffer) It sounds morbid, but this is all about who is in charge. Naturally, instinctively, I am in charge. We’re all the same! The

challenge for us is to not only call Jesus Lord, but for us to make Jesus Lord and live our lives in His ways. To do that, there is a death to die, to ego, to self, to me! We live in a culture that is “me-centred” – I will do what I want, what suits me; that’s the way I will go; I don’t care about anyone else! We see it in all sorts of ways: we see it in the way in which people drive on the roads, and in attitudes to all sorts of things, in all kinds of relationships, demanding that I get my way and you have to give me what I want – “me” is at the centre and nothing else matters. So this challenge to be Jesus-centred goes against the grain for our world! It is totally at odds with the attitudes we see around us! Listen again to what Jesus has to say about ego: “*Whoever wants...*” (*Matthew 16:25*) How does that work in our world? The expectation on Jesus’ part is that His disciples will take this challenge seriously.

Jesus who loves us, who knows what it is like to suffer, who forgives us, who is full of compassion for us when life is hard, who listens to our cries and answers us, who walks with us through life’s dark streets, who brings grace to us at all the times of our lives – this is what Bible says we can expect of Jesus; this is the message of the cross; this is Jesus. His expectation of us – that we follow Him; that we be people who are ruled by Jesus, not by ego; people who are learning to be like Jesus, with our attitudes, words, actions, and behaviour shaped by Jesus; people who are kind, considerate, faithful, loyal, generous; who have put ego to death and who call Jesus “Lord”. Where are we in fulfilling Jesus’ expectations of us? Here’s a conversation that turned expectations on their heads; are we finding same thing happening to us?