

Great Expectations  
June 28, 2015

With the decision of five Americans this week concerning a redefinition of marriage, our nation takes a giant step away from Biblical revelation. Many Americans do not think of their lives and our nation with a Biblical worldview. They do not believe in Yahweh, the God of the Bible. If they believe in any god it is a god that they shape into their image. They have invented their own god, one who agrees with what they believe and who approves of how they want to live. Of course, there are times that life does not fit their belief system. When something bad happens in their lives, they complain that they do not deserve such things.

We Christians do the same thing. There are times that we think the world should work the way we want it to, not the way it does. Some of this belief we pick up from American culture. Some of it comes naturally to all sinners.

As Americans, we believe we deserve whatever comforts and lifestyle we have achieved through our hard work. We have pulled ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We have gotten an education, taken work, worked hard, paid our dues, and are enjoying the rewards that America offers its citizens.

As Christians, we may mistakenly believe that we deserve special treatment by God because of our service to Jesus. We may believe that we deserve a good lifestyle, a good family, and good health because of being Christians. This comes out usually in hard times when something happens to diminish our good lifestyle or health.

But Jesus teaches something very different, as we will see when we get to Luke 17. But I want to start by looking at a story that I think illustrates this sinful attitude that even Christians can adopt.

The setting for this event is the land of Israel. At this point in time, the nation of Israel has just split into two nations. The southern part is renamed Judah. It is ruled by Rehoboam, a grandson of King David. Rehoboam is the legitimate king. His father Solomon taxed the people heavily. Rehoboam has promised to tax them even more. So they rebel. But the temple of Yahweh, the place that the Jews are supposed to worship Yahweh, lies in Jerusalem, the capital of Judah.

The northern, and more populated part of what was Israel, is still named Israel. Jeroboam is the new king of this Israel. And right away he sees a problem with his new nation. Jeroboam realizes that if the people of his country worship God of in Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, that their hearts may return to Rehoboam and they may remove Jeroboam as king. They may reunite the two nations.

So, in violation of God's command, Jeroboam establishes two new places for the Israelites to worship. One is in the town of Dan and the other in the city of Bethel. The story we are about to read takes place at the Bethel, at the altar that Jeroboam has built and where he himself is worshipping.

**1 Kings 13:3-24 (NIV)** By the word of the LORD a man of God came from Judah to Bethel, as Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make an offering. He cried out against

the altar by the word of the LORD: "O altar, altar! This is what the LORD (Yahweh) says: 'A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who now make offerings here, and human bones will be burned on you.'"

That same day the man of God gave a sign: "This is the sign the LORD (Yahweh) has declared: The altar will be split apart and the ashes on it will be poured out."

We can try to imagine what this man of God told his wife before he left home. He probably told her that God had given him a very dangerous assignment. He was supposed to cross the border into enemy territory and confront the king of Israel about his sin. If this king took offense, which he likely would, he might order that I be killed. So if I don't make it back home, you'll know why.

**1 Kings 13:4-19 (NIV)** When King Jeroboam heard what the man of God cried out against the altar at Bethel, he stretched out his hand from the altar and said, "Seize him!" But the hand he stretched out toward the man shriveled up, so that he could not pull it back. Also, the altar was split apart and its ashes poured out according to the sign given by the man of God by the word of the LORD (Yahweh).

Then the king said to the man of God, "Intercede with the LORD (Yahweh) your God and pray for me that my hand may be restored."

So the man of God interceded with the LORD (Yahweh), and the king's hand was restored and became as it was before.

The king said to the man of God, "Come home with me and have something to eat, and I will give you a gift."

But the man of God answered the king, "Even if you were to give me half your possessions, I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water here. For I was commanded by the word of the LORD (Yahweh) : 'You must not eat bread or drink water or return by the way you came.'" So he took another road and did not return by the way he had come to Bethel.

Now there was a certain old prophet living in Bethel, whose sons came and told him all that the man of God had done there that day. They also told their father what he had said to the king. Their father asked them, "Which way did he go?" And his sons showed him which road the man of God from Judah had taken. So he said to his sons, "Saddle the donkey for me." And when they had saddled the donkey for him, he mounted it and rode after the man of God.

He found him sitting under an oak tree and asked, "Are you the man of God who came from Judah?"

"I am," he replied.

So the prophet said to him, "Come home with me and eat."

The man of God said, "I cannot turn back and go with you, nor can I eat bread or drink water with you in this place. I have been told by the word of the LORD (Yahweh) : 'You must not eat bread or drink water there or return by the way you came.'"

The old prophet answered, "I too am a prophet, as you are. And an angel said to me by the word of the LORD (Yahweh) : 'Bring him back with you to your house so that he may eat bread and drink water.'" (But he was lying to him.)

So the man of God returned with him and ate and drank in his house.

Why do you think, after God had told him NOT to eat or drink anything on this trip in the land of Israel, that he believed what this stranger said to him? Anybody have an idea?

I think he choose to believe the stranger because he thought he deserved to be well treated after performing such a dangerous assignment. He wanted to be treated well. He figured he deserved to be well treated. Jeroboam was ready to reward him financially as well as with food and drink. He turned that down. So surely it was okay to accept a little bread and water.

**1 Kings 13:20-24 (NIV)** While they were sitting at the table, the word of the LORD (Yahweh) came to the old prophet who had brought him back. He cried out to the man of God who had come from Judah, "This is what the LORD (Yahweh) says: 'You have defied the word of the LORD (Yahweh) and have not kept the command the LORD (Yahweh) your God gave you. You came back and ate bread and drank water in the place where he told you not to eat or drink. Therefore your body will not be buried in the tomb of your fathers.'"

When the man of God had finished eating and drinking, the prophet who had brought him back saddled his donkey for him. As he went on his way, a lion met him on the road and killed him...

I wonder if you and I do not often fall under that same spell of expectations that this man did. We have given up much to serve Jesus. We serve Him by our attendance here each Sunday. Other people are sleeping in, lying on the couch to read the papers, going out for brunch. We give money for the support of all this, while others sock it away for retirement, spend it at the beach, or buy a boat. We give of ourselves to adopt a school, feed the hungry, support missions, teach Bible Studies, and much more. Surely we deserve some good treatment for all this. Surely we deserve the good available to us.

I could fall into such thinking. This shy introvert who dislikes public speaking has had to do it nearly every week for decades. I have faced persecution from those who do not believe in the resurrection of my Savior. I have not had a normal or average life. My life has been very different even from you who have been here as long as I have. It would be easy to feel sorry for myself and start thinking that I deserve some reward now, not just in heaven.

If I pursued that line of thinking I could easily turn lazy. I could start stealing from the church, rationalizing it as a deserved benefit. I could start resenting you. I could look to leaving just for more money or perks. This is how we see some pastors, some businessmen, some entertainers, and some politicians behave.

I don't doubt that all of us have such thoughts from time to time. We have such thoughts about the kind of lifestyle we want to live. We expect a certain level of comforts. We also expect a certain level of health. And when things go wrong with our bodies, our lives, we may resent, at least at first, that God isn't providing better for us. We who have worked so long and so well for Him deserve more.

At least, that is a temptation that we face. But the truth is that we do not deserve the things we hope to have. Jesus brings this out in one of His teaching sessions.

**Luke 17:7-10 (NIV)** "Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

If we had a slave and he was working in the field all day and came in at dinnertime we would not tell him to sit down so that we could prepare him something to eat. We would not serve the servant. Instead, we would expect the servant to take care of our needs. That is what we pay him for. We should not expect more than is promised. And actually, we have been promised a lot. Jesus says God will reward us for the good we have done on earth. But that reward is in heaven, not on earth.

By April 15th of this year you were expected to fill out an income tax form and submit it along with all the supporting facts and figures. Along with this form you were expected to send a check for any additional taxes that you owed. If Jesus were using this as an example He would ask, "Should we expect a thank-you card from the IRS for paying our taxes?" The answer, of course, is no. Paying our taxes is our duty, one to which we do not expect any expression of gratitude. We don't expect a reward of any kind for doing what we are supposed to do.

The same should be true in our attitude towards serving Jesus. We serve out of gratitude that He has died for us, forgiven our sin, and promised us eternal life. We do not serve, or should not serve, believing He should reward us on earth with good health or prosperity.

We already live better than 90% of the people on the planet. We already live freer than most people in history. Many other Christians in the world today cannot say the same. They are in fear of their lives today because of where they live.

**God does not promise us riches or health on earth for our service to Him.**

He does promise us riches in heaven. Even these are gifts of His grace. We have not earned any reward by our obedience to Jesus. Complete obedience is our duty. At the very least, it is what we owe Jesus. He owes us nothing except what He has promised. And none of His promises include health and wealth on earth.

**If we let ourselves think we deserve even the good things we already have because of our service to Jesus, such thinking will lead to pride and other sins, like ingratitude, apathy, and resentment.**

I'll end this morning with a story that Ray Stedman told. It is the story of a faithful missionary couple that illustrates this point very well.

"Years ago I heard of a missionary couple returning from Africa in the days of Teddy Roosevelt. It happened that after years of service they came back on the same ship as President Roosevelt, who was returning from a big-game hunting expedition in Africa. ...

When they pulled into New York harbor there was a band playing for Roosevelt, and all the high officials of the city were there to meet him. But the missionary couple slipped off the ship unnoticed, and rented a run-down flat on the East Side of New York. The man was utterly crushed, and said to his wife, "It isn't fair, it just isn't fair! Here we are, we haven't any money, we don't know who is going to take care of us or where we are going. God has promised great things, but nothing's happened. We've given him everything we've got, and what has he done for us? But just look at what happens when the president goes on a big-game hunt! It isn't fair!"

His wife said, "Dear, I know it isn't fair, but this isn't the right attitude. You mustn't think this way. Why don't you go into the bedroom and talk to the Lord about it, and see what he has to say?"

So he did. He went in and knelt by the bed, alone. He was there a long time, but when he came out his face was alight, and his wife saw that something had happened. She said, "What happened?"

And he said, "I got down on my knees and poured out the whole story to the Lord. I told him that I thought it was so unfair and especially that when we came home the president got this big welcome but no one cared about us. I told him that he was treating us all wrong. But you know what the Lord said to me? He said, 'But you're not home yet.'"

Even as we celebrate our great freedoms this week, let us not assume that we deserve any of them. As we eat good food with family and friends and enjoy the cool of air conditioning, let us not look around and think, "See what I have provided myself."

And as the year goes on and we lose some of those good things, we lose our health, let us not gripe and complain as if we deserved better. Because we don't. Instead When you lose what you have or fail to get what you think you deserve, say to yourself, **"But I'm not home yet."**

When you get home, it will be much better.

Jesus said, what if you gain the whole world, become the richest person in the world, and it lasts for 100 years... and then you die and go to hell. Will it be worth it? Absolutely not. Jesus says to pursue forgiveness of sin and eternal life. That will be worth whatever you have to live through here.