

Jesus Does the Unexpected

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Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one to come, or should we look for another?" And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'

Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears, let him hear." Matt. 11:2-15

If you read the Old Testament and the history of Israel, you may notice a common theme that appears again and again. That is, God does not always act in the way we might expect.

Many people in Israel expected God to do certain things. One group, called the Zealots, thought that God would deliver them from Roman occupation and that Israel would become politically independent of them.

Another group, named the Essenes, expected there to soon be a final time of judgment in which all sinners, both inside and outside of Israel, would be condemned, and the righteous would be glorified.

In general, most people were at least expecting that when the Messiah came God would restore Israel to its former glory.

But the Jesus Christ who came was not the Jesus Christ most people expected. He was not the Jesus Christ most people wanted. Of all things, Jesus' call to repentance and the Good News he had to share could be resisted! On the one hand the demons and nature itself obeyed his words and commands, but many people rejected his words and did not believe him. What kind of a king was this?

Not only did this king not have the irresistible power that would be expected of a king, his reign would actually suffer from violence. Look, he said so himself in verse 12: "The kingdom of God suffers violence and the violent take it by force." Well, that was certainly right. His own cousin, an important messenger named John the Baptist, was in prison and would soon be executed. Jesus himself would be rejected and crucified. The disciples could expect persecution. The judgment foretold by John-where was it?

Jesus identified John as the greatest person even born. John's ministry marked the dramatic time in history when God fulfilled his promise to send a Savior. Yet Jesus also said that the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than John. Does that statement seem a little mysterious to you? Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs from St. Louis explains this comment when he points out that John was still occupied on earth at that time, and that because of God's grace, even the least in the kingdom of heaven was better off than John was.

Jesus often does the unexpected. That meant he often did not meet the expectations of the people of his day. That brings us to the question, "What are our expectations today?"

If we are honest, Jesus often doesn't meet our expectations. We may at times find ourselves thinking and behaving in a way similar to many people in Jesus' day. We might find ourselves asking questions just like John did. People may ask questions like, "If God loves his creation, why is he allowing all this suffering?" or "If someone is a Christian, why is God allowing members of ISIS to chop off their heads? Why doesn't he stop this extensive persecution going on in so many countries?" There are many other questions that can be asked.

The answer is in the Holy Scriptures but many people don't want to look there. If they do, they may not want to accept the answers. But that doesn't change a thing as far as God is concerned. Our first parents disobeyed God and brought sin and death into the world. All of us continue to deal with the effects of this sin-blindness, disease, separation, and death, along with many other things. We copy their behavior with our own sin and rebellion against God.

As far as God loving us is concerned, God showed his love for us by sending his Son Jesus Christ. Our sin needed to be atoned for in a way acceptable to our holy God. The miracles Jesus performed - the blind receiving sight, the lame walking, the deaf hearing, the dead being raised, and other miraculous events - show that Jesus has the power to undo sin and its effects. If people knew the Holy Scriptures, this should have been expected by the people, for in doing them Jesus fulfilled many of God's promises made through the prophet Isaiah.

In the end, Jesus' death and resurrection was unexpected by almost everyone, even though he had predicted it. Matthew tells us in chapter 20, "...the Son of

Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." That God would save people through Jesus' humble service, suffering, and death is probably the most unexpected thing of all.

To those who saw this, or who hear about it and believe it, there is forgiveness, new life, and salvation. We are not exempt from the effects of sin in this world, but more importantly, our relationship with God the Father has been restored through his Son Jesus Christ. We patiently wait for Jesus to return on the Last Day at which time all things will be restored for us, and we no longer will experience the effects of sin and death.

So let us do what we should be doing about Christmas. Let us know our Bible well enough that we can show people what was unexpected really should have been expected. Let us be the witnesses Christ has called us to be and seek out the non-churched and invite them to our church home this Christmas to hear the Good News. For to those who do not know the Lord, or who are not sure about the Lord, we can have a role in their receiving the greatest gift of all this Christmas. John 1:12 tells us about this great gift when it states, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God..." What greater gift could there be that that? Amen.