WHAT DO YOU EXPECT OF JESUS?

1. What the people of Nazareth expected and what they got
2. Jesus’ reaction and theirs
3. What we expect and what we get

What do you expect of Jesus? People would give different answers to that question. If you had lived in Nazareth in the late 20’s AD and had known Jesus and his family as he was growing up, you would have formed an impression of him. You probably would have thought of him as a good, godly young man, undoubtedly skilled and honest and reliable in his trade as a carpenter.

But there would have been other things you had known about him, accounts that would have raised your expectations. You would have heard that he had performed miracles. He had left his hometown a while ago to be baptized by John the Baptist. Then he had acquired a few disciples and gone around Galilee, the northern part of the Holy Land, where Nazareth was. In the town of Capernaum, perhaps a day’s walk from his hometown, you heard of the miracles he had performed.

Luke’s Gospel might seem confusing here, because it is not always in chronological order. If you read Matthew and Mark, you will see that Jesus had driven out an evil spirit from a man in the synagogue at Capernaum. He had healed Simon Peter’s mother-in-law of a fever and that same night healed many who had various diseases, and also driven out many evil spirits in Capernaum. A little later Jesus had healed the paralyzed man who was let down on a stretcher through the roof, and in that same town of Capernaum he had healed a woman who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years, and then proceeded to raise the deceased 12 year-old daughter of the synagogue ruler, Jairus, to life. Now, after all these things he did in Capernaum, Jesus comes to your town, his hometown. Certainly you would expect him to perform equally great miracles here.

In fact, you might expect Jesus to stay and settle down in his hometown and set up shop as the great Healer. Think of the customers that would bring to your local businesses. And you might also expect Jesus to have acquired some financial wealth through his preaching and miracle working. Even if he was not in it for that, still you would expect some of the people he helped to reward him rather generously.

So when the people of Jesus’ hometown heard that he had returned, they came expectantly to the synagogue that Saturday morning. I would guess that no one fell asleep or had their minds wander when he spoke that day.

What they got, however, was not what they had expected. He got up, read from the prophet Isaiah about being anointed to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, and to release the oppressed. Then he applied those verses to himself. That was pretty tough for his people to swallow. Yes, All spoke well of him, but they just could not think of their hometown boy as someone that great. Good news to the poor? Why, it was obvious he was still poor himself. What could he possibly tell them? And as for miracles, well Mark reports in his Gospel that Jesus did a few, but nothing like he had done in Capernaum. Jesus had to be a big disappointment to them.
So what was Jesus' reaction and theirs? We are told: **All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked.**

They may have spoken well of Jesus, but Jesus knew their hearts. He knew their words were shallow. He also sensed some disappointment; after all, he had performed very few miracles. So he brought out in the open what his hometown friends were perhaps too polite to say: **Surely you will quote this proverb to me: Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.** Jesus knew that, in their eyes, he looked like a doctor who took care of everyone but himself, or a plumber or electrician or furnace man whose own house was falling apart. Why would he run around to all these other towns doing miracles and neglect his hometown?

So Jesus called his people’s attention to two other prophets, Elijah and Elisha, whose most outstanding miracles had been performed, not just for people from another Israeli town, but for people totally outside of Israel. In Elijah’s case, it was a widow of Zarephath in Syria, and in Elisha’s case it was a military commander with leprosy named Naaman, also from Syria.

What is the point? The point is there were lots of people in Israel who could have used God’s help from Elijah and Elisha 800 years earlier - lots of needy widows and people with leprosy - but instead of these needy Israelites, God sent his prophets to foreigners. Likewise, instead of concentrating his efforts on his hometown, Jesus was spending a lot of his time elsewhere.

Those were fighting words. It is like preaching a sermon in Norway and informing your congregation that God has told you to concentrate your efforts on the Swedes, or going to Haiti and donating a few dollars and then informing the people of Haiti that you have several million dollars earmarked for Mexico. It is no wonder these people of Nazareth were upset with him. They were so furious that they tried to throw him down a cliff and kill him.

But why? Why does Jesus even say that? Is he trying to stir up trouble for himself? No, by bringing up the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the leper, Jesus was pleading with his people to make an exception to the rule that no prophet is accepted in his hometown. The book of Romans states that God’s object was to make his people envious by those who are not a nation. It is like, what is the best way to get a kid interested in a toy? Give the toy to some other kid to play with. And one technique God uses to get the people of Israel interested in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to give it to the Gentiles, the non-Jews, or at least take it to some other town. Jesus wanted nothing but good for his people. He was not trying to be mean to them.

So what do people expect of Jesus today? Well, there are those who expect miracles and signs and if they do not get them, they think Jesus cannot be for real. There are those who expect Jesus to enrich them and are appalled when they see Bible-believing churches struggling for funds and when they themselves do not become wealthy. There are those who think, like Jesus’ hometown people of Nazareth: **Hey, I have been brought up with Jesus; I am a lifelong Christian, a lifelong Lutheran. I expect some special consideration. Jesus has to take away**
my problem, take away my pain. Why doesn’t he answer my prayers?

But, in both the case in Nazareth and in our own case, there is something more: Jesus said he had been sent to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, and to release the oppressed. He is referring to spiritual conditions, to poor sinful people, to people enslaved by their own lusts and passions, to people too blind to have any spiritual insights, to people oppressed and unable to overcome Satan. Who wants to admit they are like that? That is degrading. We want to think we can handle things spiritually, that we are all right with God and he will accept us as we are.

But if we are willing to let God be God and let Jesus be Lord, we will not be disappointed. If we are willing to be happy that God sent his Son for poor, imprisoned, blind, oppressed people like us, to live a perfect life for us and to die for our sins - then we will not care if he seems to devote more of his time and energy to others. Why shouldn’t he? Any scrap of love he gives us is far more than we deserve. And the truth is, he does not give us just a scrap of his love, but enough love to enable us to have eternal life in heaven. In fact, he loves each one of us as much as he loves the wealthiest, happiest, healthiest person alive - even though, outwardly, it might not seem that way. We have absolutely nothing to be envious of, absolutely nothing to be offended by.

So Jesus left his hometown of Nazareth and returned to Capernaum. And the people there accept his message. If people in one place are not ready to listen, someone else will. Jesus will move on. When America stops being favorable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Lord will send it elsewhere.

Jesus moved on. He miraculously escaped those who were trying to kill him. He looked like a doctor who could not take care of himself. Later, on the cross, he had looked like a Savior who could not save himself. But he was not here to save himself or to heal himself, but us. When we trust in him, we will not be disappointed. When he comes in the clouds and is seated on his throne on Judgment Day, no one is going to say: Wait – isn’t that Joseph’s son? No, everyone will recognize Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world, the only Savior of the world. For some, he will be the Savior they could have trusted in, but did not. For us, he will be the Savior who has given us eternal life. Amen.

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