

What Did We Expect?

Introduction

The Text

¹⁰ Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹ And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your disability.” ¹³ And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. ¹⁴ But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, “There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.” ¹⁵ Then the Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? ¹⁶ And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” ¹⁷ As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.

¹⁸ He said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? ¹⁹ It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.”

²⁰ And again he said, “To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? ²¹ It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened.” (Luke 13:10–21)

Unmet Expectations

- A. It seems to me that few things in life are more painful, more distressing, more disorienting than what we might call unmet expectations—when we have a hope, a thought, a plan, an expectation that things will go one way but instead they go another.
1. Do you have any of these? Do you come into this room this morning with any of these?
- B. No doubt, if not presently, you’ve at least experienced this sort of thing in one way or another:
1. Perhaps it was back when you decided to make a significant job change. You just couldn’t stand the current situation and you built it up in your mind that if you could just line up that job over there, all of this struggle and stress would just disappear. You prayed about it. You thought God was leading.
 - a. And you went for it, you put in your two weeks, you packed up your things and started with this new company . . . only to find after a few months that you were in for precisely the same sort of drama that was burdening you at the last place. Unmet expectations.
 2. Paul Tripp, a well-known author and biblical counselor, wrote a book on marriage and, perhaps you’re familiar with what he titled it: [What Did You Expect?](#) No doubt, he selected

this for the title because he's aware that, as a culture, we watch the movies, we listen to the songs, we start buying into this idea that marriage is somehow going to complete us.

- a. And then we get in and find out that it's hard. It's a joy, no doubt, but it's hard. And really what we come to find is that the joy in marriage is found only on the other side of dying to self in love for our spouse. "[Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her](#)" (Eph 5:25). I mean, I don't know if you caught it there, but Jesus is talking about your death. That hurts sometimes. That's not what I was expecting.
3. And then I'm sure there are others who come at it from the other direction. "I wish I could have a job to complain about. I can't find work. I keep applying and applying and putting on my interview suit, or whatever, and I'm coming back empty." "I wish I could have a spouse to struggle with. I've been praying to God for years. And nothing. I thought He would answer. I thought He would provide. I expected that. And those expectations have gone unmet."
- C. A lot can happen in the gap that forms between our expectations and reality. We can grow pessimistic, bitter, frustrated, jaded, depressed in that space . . . not just with other people, but with God. "Why would You let this happen? Why does it feel like You've abandoned me? Where are You?" There's a war that wages there, and, if we're honest, we're not always winning.
 1. We experience, I think, something of what the author of Proverbs talks about in [Pro 13:12](#): "[Hope deferred makes the heart sick . . .](#)"
 - a. Anyone sick in this room this morning? Well, in our text for this morning, Jesus has come to offer us help.
- D. Now, I'm going to be looking at [vv. 18-21](#) in particular, those two parables that Jesus gives us. And I want to bring three questions to the table here for us to consider: (1) What Should We Expect?; (2) Why Do We Often Push Back?; and (3) How Can We Bridge the Gap?

(1) What Should We Expect?

"Therefore"

- A. Now my decision to include [vv. 10-17](#) in a sermon dealing particularly with [vv. 18-21](#) is simply due to the presence of one little word there in [v. 18](#): "[therefore](#)": "[He said therefore, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it?"](#)"
 1. That little word connects what's come before with these two parables he then goes on to give about the kingdom of God. He shared these parables concerning the kingdom because of something that went down in that synagogue.
- B. Well, to come at the matter simply, I think, as we shall see, in these parables Jesus is coming at this idea of unmet expectations. Throughout [Luke 13](#), and really this entire gospel, the religious leaders

are unwilling to accept that Jesus could somehow be the Messiah, the Christ, because of how far off He is from what they expected, not mention what they truly wanted.

1. And so Jesus is going to address this. "You thought the kingdom of God, you thought the Messiah, was going to look that way, but instead it's gone this way. Let me help you understand what's happening here."

2 Parables

- A. And so He tells two parables. Let's look at them again: "¹⁸ He said therefore, 'What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it?' ¹⁹ It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.' ²⁰ And again he said, 'To what shall I compare the kingdom of God?' ²¹ It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened'" (vv. 18-21).
- B. Now, these parables communicate something to us about the nature of the kingdom of God. I see three things to highlight for us here.
 1. And the hope is that, when we get this, it will realign our expectations with reality, with the way things really are, with the way God really is moving in our lives and in the world.

(1) Organic

- A. The first thing to note concerning the nature of the kingdom of God is that it's organic.
 1. This is the sort of thing that comes out especially in the imagery of the first parable. There's this slow-going growth and development from seed to tree.
 2. And really the idea comes out as well in the second parable, where a little pinch of yeast, seems insignificant at first, and then after a while it's permeated the whole lump of dough.
 - a. The entrance and the development of the kingdom of God is much more organic than anticipated. Many of the Jews of Jesus' day were expecting some sort of cataclysmic arrival and entrance of the kingdom in the Messiah.
 - i. Well, Jesus says it is here, have no doubt about that, but its growth will be slow, inconspicuous, at times, barely even noticeable.
- B. Now this, of course, flies in the face of the spirit of our day and age as well, right? What we want is the immediate, the loud and flashy, the big and fast-moving. We think that's where the life is.
 1. Listen, you've seen those roasted chickens at Costco, right? I go to the regular grocery store and their chickens, you know, you get maybe a meal for two people out of it. But I get one of those chickens at Costco (I've seen Thanksgiving turkeys smaller than these things) and I can feed not just my family on that, we're calling in the neighbor kids to help us finish it off. And it's like half the price. Don't you wonder how this works?
 - a. So let me ask you: If I were set one of these Costco chickens in front of you and place next to it maybe an organic roasted chicken from Whole Foods or whatever,

where it's like four times the price and half the amount. The choice is clear, right? I don't want the slow-going, natural little thing, when I can feed my whole village on this. I don't care how they got it that big and that cheap, that's the one I want.

- C. And this is the sort of thing we can do with the kingdom of God too. And we need to realize that.
1. We want the quick growth stuff. We want the 5 steps to freedom or whatever. And when we take the steps and it doesn't happen for us immediately, when we're still struggling with that same sin or dealing with that same issue, we think God's failed us, abandoned us, that He doesn't work.
 - a. But He never said He would work that way. Our expectation is not aligned with His revelation, with reality, with the way the kingdom truly works and advances. It's organic. It's often slow. But it is moving.
 2. And we can approach church this way as well. We want to go where the music is popping and all the seats are taken, the lights are shining, the fog machine's going, there's a buzz in the air, the pastor has that kind of hipster vibe to him. He's got a new outfit every Sunday and a fresh haircut like he just walked out of the barber shop. We like that. We're drawn to it. We think that there's life there because there's activity and noise.
 - a. But is the gospel at the center of this? Surely, you're aware that sometimes (though certainly not always) the way churches try to fill their pews is by watering down and diluting the gospel. "Yes we know the Bible says over and over again repent and receive the work of Christ on the cross or you will go to Hell forever, but that's not a feel-good sort of message. People don't want to hear that about themselves. So let's just kind of talk around that. We'll chat on grace and love but let's quite down a bit about the sin and wrath piece."
 - i. But now listen to me: At the end of the day, who cares if you can fill a church if you're not calling those people to repent of their sin and trust in Jesus, take up their cross and follow Him as their King wherever He may lead. Though it's got this buzz and all this activity, there's no kingdom of God there.
- D. So Jesus is saying to us: "Listen, don't trust your instincts on this. Often the kingdom of God is on the move in the most mundane and everyday sort of contexts."
1. I think that's why Jesus chooses these everyday scenarios for the parable. In an agrarian society like Israel at the time, it doesn't get more mundane than a man planting a seed and woman baking some bread. These are just everyday tasks. This boring, slow-going stuff. And He's saying the kingdom is kind of like that. That's how it advances!
- E. Now I suppose this idea of an organic, slowly developing, kingdom shouldn't surprise us. After all, that's how Jesus, the King of this kingdom, has been doing things from the very start, right? Think of it. He's born to a poor family, in an unimpressive little town, in an animal trough, with no one celebrating His birth at first except some grungy shepherds. And this is His grand entrance?!

(2) Internal

- A. Two other quick things to bring out about the nature of the kingdom of God that we see in these parables. One is that it's first internal before it's ever external.
 - 1. Though we can get this idea with the idea of the seed being planted underneath the soil only later to sprout and grow, I think this reality is more clearly presented in the second parable, with this idea of leaven taken and "hid[den]" in the flour (v. 21). It goes inside the dough and does its work there. You can't see it from the outside.
- B. The kingdom of God is first and fundamentally an internal reality. It is something that begins inside a person, with transformation of the heart, and moves out from there.
 - 1. If the church could've just seen this back in the Middle Ages, perhaps the whole spotted history of the crusades and so-called "holy wars" would have been avoided. We're not going to make converts by the sword, the kingdom first comes into the heart, and then it comes out with great affect in the life.
- C. And, again, this was not what the leaders here in Israel were expecting. For them, it seems, external conformity was everything. The Messiah was going to come in and bring the kingdom in external ways, with the crushing of enemies and things like this.

(3) Universal

- A. The third thing to note is that this kingdom will be universal in scope. Though it starts small, and begins with the internal, even invisible, realms of the heart, it will eventually spread and expand to universal proportions.
 - 1. That's the idea pointed to with this tree in which the birds of the air will come and nest in its branches (cf. [Ezek 17:22-24](#)).
 - 2. And that I think is the meaning of the leaven spreading throughout this massive lump of dough. Three measures of flour was probably somewhere around 50 pounds of flour, an amount that would produce enough bread to feed around 100 people! Again, the image seems to be that the leaven of the kingdom, the extent of its expansion, will be vast, even universal.
 - a. We know from the book of [Rev](#) that the kingdom will eventually be composed of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.
- B. This again is not necessarily what the leaders in Israel at this time expected nor wanted. "I don't want Gentiles coming into this kingdom. I want Gentiles bowing down, fine. But coming in? Nesting? Blessed by it. I'm not so sure."

(2) Why Do We Often Push Back?

- A. The takeaway for us in all of this, put simply, is: When we think God is not at work, not doing anything, He is. More than we know.

1. But the next question comes in: If this is the case (and Jesus is making it plain to us here) why do we often push back against it? Why, when that gap starts to form between my expectation and reality, do I often find it easier to blame God and argue with Him than to open my heart to Him and let Him realign me with reality and the ways of His kingdom?

2 Reasons

- A. Now think with me about this ruler of the synagogue back in [Luke 13](#) (and he's just representative of so many of the religious leaders in Israel). Why, instead of opening to Jesus, does this guy turn bitter and angry and insist that Jesus is an imposter and couldn't be the Messiah?

1. I mean think of it. In this synagogue, on the Sabbath, with a word and a touch, Jesus heals this woman who had been bent over by the devil for 18 years we're told, and, seeing this, the ruler of the synagogue is . . . what? "Indignant" (v. 14).
 - a. Instead of seeing the power of God at work in Jesus here; instead of repenting and going: "Man, I've missed it and I'm sorry, surely You are the One!"; instead of repenting and opening himself up to Jesus . . .
 - b. . . he doubles-down on his claim that Jesus can't be of God and even uses this miracle as support for it: "You see! This man doesn't even care about the Sabbath. Look at Him. Healing this woman right here in complete disregard for the Law of God, which tells us we should be resting not working. He's not from YHWH. Clearly He must be getting His power from the Devil."

- B. And I'm wondering here, what is that? What's behind that? This guy has clear indication of the kingdom's presence and yet he's unwilling to admit it or embrace Jesus as the King. Why? As I thought about this, two reasons came to mind:

1. First, this guy doubles down and resists because to let Jesus in would mean having to face sin in himself.
2. And second, this guy won't embrace Jesus as He is here because it would mean having to let go of some of his own plans.

- C. Think about it.

1. Saying that Jesus and His message and mission is for real, would mean admitting that he too needs a Savior and has been wrong before God. That he's missed the heart of the Law of God even while he was memorizing it and teaching it to others.
2. It would mean letting go of his idea of the Messiah, that the main agenda is taking down Rome, and vindicating Israel's right to the Land and their place in society and the world. He wanted worldly accolades and worldly power and worldly comforts and he was going to have to let that go if he was going to get on board with Jesus here.

- D. So instead of rejoicing when Jesus miraculously heals this woman, this ruler of the synagogue is indignant. He refuses to see God at work in Him.

1. And the gap between his expectations and reality grows wider. And his heart grows harder. And he gets further and further out of touch with what God is really doing in the world.

What About Us?

- A. Now let's turn this on ourselves for a moment. Think about those unmet expectation that you have in your relationship with God. Those places where you're tempted to feel abandoned by Him. He's not at work here. You're losing hope. You're even growing bitter. You've prayed and quoted Scripture and it didn't amount to anything. In fact, it feels like it just got worse.
 1. There's this widening gap between what you thought He would do and what He's actually doing in your life. And things are starting to fester.
- B. My sense is that, if you're willing to look behind that stuff you're feeling, you'll likely find these two things lurking in your heart.
 1. There are sins that you don't want to own up to and face and these unmet expectations are bringing that out. You're not willing to own it yet and let God talk to you about it.
 2. And there are plans that you had for your life that you don't want to release and with these unmet expectations God's calling you out on it. "Will you trust Me to do what's best for you?"
- C. And you're faced with a decision:
 1. Am I going to let Him have His way with me here? Am I going to open up to Him and let Him show me how He truly is at work in this, how His kingdom is right here, it's just not what I ever pictured or would have wanted?
 2. Or am I going to double-down, blame Him, name-call, grow bitter, and go blind to the presence and movement of His kingdom in my midst?
- D. Listen to me brothers and sisters: When we become overly fixated on what God is not doing for us we miss all that He really and truly is doing. We can't see it. We won't see it. We miss the seed and leaven. We miss the growth of God—the advance of His kingdom around us. And we run the risk of being left behind.
 1. Like a train pulling away from the station, the kingdom of God just moves on without us, because we wouldn't get on board.
 - a. As Jesus says in the text we'll look at next week, there's a lot in Israel who won't be at the table in the coming kingdom God ([Luke 13:28-29](#)). They missed it.

(3) How Can We Bridge the Gap?

- A. I don't want to miss it. I don't want to be like that. So how do we bridge this gap? How do push against our inclination to push against Him? Let me close here by giving us just two practical suggestions on this point.

2 Suggestions

(1) Read Your Bible

- A. In [Rom 15:4](#), Paul writes: “[W]hatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”
1. What I want you to understand is that, when we read our Bibles, we see this same thing playing out again and again. The people expected God to do one thing, but instead He does another thing. And in the gap between they grumble and resist and some even reject Him, but if they’d just opened to Him they would see how good His plans were for them.
- B. We see this throughout the OT and then when we come to the NT we get the clearest example of all with the cross, right? I mean, Jesus’ life doesn’t just start off seemingly small and insignificant, it actually gets worse. He’s captured and bound and whipped and mocked and shamed and, ultimately, killed.
1. And then you remember the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, right? They’re all down because they thought He was the One—“He was going to liberate us from Rome, get the kingdom going here. Instead He’s dead. We expected one thing. God did another.” And in the gap between, they’re depressed. They’ve given up hope.
- C. But, now, let me ask you something, and this is really important: In the death of His Son, was God doing less than these guys expected, or more?
1. The answer for us on the other side of the resurrection is abundantly clear, right? God is doing so much more, infinitely more than these guys could’ve wrapped their minds around at the time. They were worried about Rome. But God was taking down Satan, sin, and death itself. The kingdom of God hadn’t stalled out at the cross, it was advancing in unprecedented fashion.
- D. We read our Bibles, we see this play out again and again, and we learn to bridge the gap. God is not doing less here, but more. I might not see it yet, but I will soon. “Jesus I’m open to you. Talk to me, teach me, show me where your kingdom is moving, because I’ve lost it, but I know it’s here.”

(2) Name Your Struggle

- A. Sadly, sometimes the church is not the most open and honest place. Sometimes we all feel a bit scared of each other and fake like we’re fine when we know we’re not.
1. As Christians we have these high standards, whether doctrinally or morally. And that’s good, but only if they are seen in light of grace and God’s covenantal commitment and care for us in our struggles.
- B. What can happen is, we come in and start to see these standards, and if we are struggling with them, if we’re doubting some tenet of the faith, or giving into temptation to some sin, we’re often really scared to come out with it and speak openly with others in the church. We think we’ll be

rejected, and, again sadly, sometimes that is what happens, contrary to the heart of God and open arms of Christ.

1. And the end result is that we grow good at faking it until suddenly we can't or we don't want to. The gap between what we expected would happen and our reality has grown so big it's threatening to swallow us up. We kept thinking if we press forward and just believe it, if we try to get over this sin or struggle on our own, etc. in time we'll make progress but it just gets worse. Things don't resolve or heal, they fester.
 - a. And so, in a moment of rare honesty, we finally explode but it's too late. It's not to get help or prayer or to find co-travelers in the journey, it's to declare that we're done, we're out, this is over. It's not been what we expected and it all feels like a fairytale to us now.
- C. But, I am telling you, God is not the problem here, the way we've handled our unmet expectations is. The Psalms teach us to go to God with our doubts and struggles—to, as I just read this last week, doubt and struggle towards God not away from Him.
- D. John the Baptist is a wonderful example on this point. What he expected from the Messiah and what he got were miles apart. One of the reasons he was speaking so boldly to the Jewish leaders in his day, calling them a “brood of vipers” and threatening judgment and things, I'm sure, is because He thought the Messiah would have his back in the here and now, and yet now he's in Herod's dungeon awaiting a blade to the neck, and he's struggling.
 1. But what does he do? “I'm a prophet for goodness sake, I can't let people know I'm struggling. What will my disciples think. What will Jesus think? I better keep playing the part even though I'm reeling inside.”
 - a. No. He doesn't do that. He doubts and struggles towards Jesus. He sends some friends to check in. “Are You the one or not?”
 2. And what does Jesus do? Rebuke? Call him out? No.
 - a. He responds with help and grace. “Re-read the Scriptures in light of who I am and what I'm doing. Things will realign for you. You'll start to see it. The Spirit will show you. I am He. This is just going to move, grow, advance in a way you wouldn't have first expected.”
 - i. In fact, Jesus then goes on to hold John out, not as an example of sin and failure, but as a good man: “I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John” (Luke 7:28a). “He doubted towards Me. He brought His struggles to Me. I can work with that. I can bridge the gap.”
- E. Don't you want to be a church where we can be name our struggles, and instead of judging each other, we offer grace and the hand of a co-traveler: “I'm with you. We don't always see it. But the kingdom of God is on the move. Let's look for it together.”