

Giving and Sharing Sacrificially

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[0 : 00] In Luke's Gospel, in chapter 19 and verse 37, we read these words just a moment ago. When Jesus came near the place where the road goes down to the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for the miracles they had seen.

Some years ago, I think it was my eldest daughter's 18th birthday, and we decided that we would all go out as a family, which in our case is quite a logistics exercise anyway.

We went to this, it wouldn't be fair for me to give the name of it, but it begins with TGI. And we went to this restaurant in High Wycombe, and in we went to celebrate my daughter's 18th birthday.

And we sat there for a while, and then a waitress came and took a drinks order, and then we sat there for a very long while, and she returned with a menu and a notebook and took our orders.

Then she disappeared for an H, and our starters arrived. And then she disappeared for an eon. And eventually she brought our meals out, which sadly looked okay, but were pretty well stone cold.

[1 : 38] At that point, my wife had been restraining me. I went to the waiter and I pointed out the deficiencies of their service and the food that they'd finally turned up with.

And he was very apologetic. He offered me a 10% discount, which I managed to get up to 50% before violence broke out.

But I thought to myself, yeah, the whole thing was just a dreadful letdown. And then I thought, actually, if I think about my life, some of my worst behaviors have arisen from situations where my expectations have been shattered.

In the world of management science now, it's a big deal. You get this phrase all over the place.

People talking about the management of expectations.

You put that into Google, within 0.39 of a second, you'll get 189,000 hits. 189,000 hits on managing expectations.

[3 : 02] I don't know if we ever managed them. What I want to talk to you about today is, how do we learn to live with those expectations that we've had in our lives that we felt let down on?

And okay, let's be honest, I got over that meal pretty quickly. But other expectations in my life may be more important expectations.

Relations counselors will tell us that one of the biggest problems that people encounter in their relationships is that of unfulfilled expectations.

Back in the day when I was in local church ministry, shortly after the Reformation, I used to have young couples come.

We had a very nice church in the middle of a field that people wanted to get married at. And they would show up there, and I would say to ask them questions like, So have you discussed money together?

[4 : 08] I'm like, no. Have you discussed having children together? No. I said, do either of you have any ideas about either of those two subjects?

Yeah. I said, so you have some expectations of how you're going to handle money and what you're going to do about children, but you've never talked about it.

It taught me that. Actually, it's very easy to have expectations of what's going to happen in your relationships, and it's not difficult to feel let down.

I suppose if I were being totally transparent with you, I would have to let my wife come up here and have a few words at this point. But I'm not going to do that.

People starting new jobs start with expectations. I was talking to the chief executive of a large company recently. He was saying he was interviewing one of those, sadly, much maligned kind of groups within our population we call millennials.

[5 : 22] Very maligned group of people. And he was just about to give a spiel about, at the end of the interview, we'll give you an opportunity to ask any questions you might have.

And the young man said, I have a question already. He said, yeah. I said, what's this job going to do for me? The guy goes, CEO goes, ooh.

We have a job here we need you to do. I hope it will do something for you. But actually, my interest in this interview is, can you do the job? You see, can you, how quickly expectations can drift in different directions and cause difficulty.

I could realize one of the most inadvertent but smartest things I ever did was when I got to my first parish where I was the minister, senior minister.

And I went to our church council meeting and I took a flip chart with me. And I said to the PCC, so what do you think my job is? I shout and stuff out.

[6 : 38] We're like on the fourth page. And I stopped them. I said, so would any of you like this job? They're all like, of course not.

I said, does anybody think there's any human being stalking the earth who could do this job?

They're like, well, of course not. So I said, but actually you're very happy to put that on my shoulders.

They're like, well, you're paid. So what we did was, we did, you know, I said, look, this is what I can do. And here is the three and a half pages that I can't do.

And I'm not saying they're not important, but I can't do that. So we're going to have to work out how do we do that together. I didn't realize how smart that was. But I tell you, it saved me a lot of sleepless nights and stress.

Jesus entered Jerusalem to a mood of great celebration. Comes out even more.

[7 : 44] I mean, you may or may not be aware of this, but this little narrative about Jesus, the so-called triumphal entry into Jerusalem, is recorded in all four of the Gospels.

It must be there to teach people like you and me something really important. In the other three versions of it, the celebratory aspect of it is even clearer. Luke tells us it was the crowd of disciples. The other Gospels tell us it was the whole crowd. And as you well know, in Mark's Gospel and Matthew's Gospel, they cut down palms from trees and chucked those on the road and didn't record that their cloaks were put on the road.

Something's going on. Why would the crowd that shouted, Bless God and Hosanna, why would that crowd, just a few days later, be the same crowd that shouted, Crucify?

Something had gone wrong. Dorothy L. Sayers, in 1941, wrote her play, it was actually 12 little plays for radio, called The Man Born to be King.

[8 : 58] One of those plays was about Judas. Of course, you know that Judas betrayed Jesus and went behind his back and sold his soul for 30 pieces of silver, which we're not quite sure what that would be worth today.

It could be anything between 70 pounds and 2,900 pounds, but not a lot of money to give somebody's life over to the enemy. And Dorothy L. Sayers' theory was that Judas suffered from shattered expectations.

She said that what Judas thought was that Jesus, the Messiah, was entering Jerusalem to lead a political mutiny, to overthrow the occupying Roman forces.

And when they saw him tied up and beat up and dragging a cross, something snapped. You know, they could see he was not going to fulfill the purpose they thought he had come to fulfill.

And their expectations were shattered. And the mood of the crowd turned ugly. And they shouted, crucify.

[10 : 15] And if you've ever thought, you know, about that little piece in the epistle of James, which is a very challenging piece of scripture, James says, the tongue, the very same tongue that you use to bless God is the very same tongue you use to curse human beings.

Hosanna. Bless God. Hosanna literally means in Hebrew, save now. What that crowd was shouting was in effect when Jesus entered Jerusalem, they were shouting political slogans.

It's a bit like, I'm not making a political point here, believe me, I'm just making an example. It's a bit like, you know, you hear the chant, Tories out. Well, the shout, save now, Hosanna, was a political rant.

And it would imply that what they were shouting was Romans out. No wonder the governor, Pilate, was very nervous when he heard this kind of insurrection arising.

But here's my point, and this is what I want to try and help you with, and in helping you help myself with, is how do we deal with expectations that are let down?

[11 : 39] Broken expectations, hopes dashed, disappointment in spades, and behavior that are out of control, behaviors that are out of control.

Of course, that leaves us with the very difficult question. And I know that in a group this size, some of you will be suffering from this big time.

And it's this, how do we deal with disappointment? How do we deal with our lives when we've been deeply disappointed?

I can remember now only too well as a young fellow at 15, 16 years old. I wanted to be a professional footballer, and I was reasonably good at football, and I got a certain way with that, and in the end I was told, actually by the manager of the enemy, Manchester City, that I would never be good enough to play in the old first division.

I mean, I tell you that now, I mean, a few days time, I'll be 70 years old. So, whatever 15 is from 70, somebody shout it out.

[12 : 56] 55? 55, I can still feel the disappointment in the pit of my stomach at being told that news. And I can remember thinking, I wasn't a believer then, I wasn't a Christian, I had nothing inside me to fight that kind of disappointment.

So I just got angrier than I already was. Acted out terrible behaviors. And disappointment can do that to you. It can break your relationships, it can break your heart.

And I know, you know, having been a pastor for the last 40 years, how much disappointment, disappointment, how much shattered expectations can affect us.

And my observation is, we have a number of ways of kind of trying to cope with this. Some of them are healthy, some of them are not so healthy. One way of dealing with it is, you just give up.

And when I was told I wasn't good enough to play first division football, I went off in a sulk and played rugby league. Some people just give up in their relationships when their expectations are let down.

[14 : 16] A woman said to me recently, she said, we'll have been married for 65 years. And she said, he's not the man I married. I'm like, I bet you're glad about that, aren't you?

She's like, you know. Some people just give up. Others push on resentfully.

You know, we're talking about expectations. What about those of you who feel let down by God?

Right? But you're still showing up in church. But deep down inside, week by week, you are smoldering with resentment.

thinking that this God in heaven dealt you a tough set of marbles, if I can use a technical theological phrase. That's what some people do.

They don't deal with their lack of expectation. They just kind of carry on. But they carry on with resentfulness and bitterness in their hearts. Then there are those people, I suppose I was like this when I was young, you just lash out.

[15 : 30] I don't mean necessarily physically, but verbally, whatever. You just become deeply unpleasant. You know, and of course, you can see deep unpleasantness in other people, but sometimes you can miss it in yourself.

I don't know, I was a Seinfeld fan, American TV sitcom when I was younger. And what's so clever about that program is that everybody on it is basically horrible.

But somehow, they end up making you like them. Well, it doesn't happen like that in real life, does it? People who are deeply unpleasant end up being deeply isolated.

The fourth thing is, and this is where it starts to get a bit more healthy, is we sort of reset our expectation dial. Somehow, it dawns on us that our expectation is unreasonable and we need to just shift it.

So, you know, if you're marrying somebody who you think is perfect, I mean, honestly, this is true, right? It shows you how way what I was. When I got married, I thought I was a real prize.

[16 : 52] I said, why are you laughing? I thought I was a real prize. I thought, you know, women get, I'm uncomplicated, I'm easygoing, you know, I'm happy-go-lucking. I'm actually not at all like that, it transpires.

I'm complicated and, you know, I'm not easy and, you know, I don't want to be like that but somehow I feel like St. Paul, you know, when he said, the good I want to do I find myself avoiding and the evil I want to avoid I find myself doing.

I don't want to be like that. How come I am? Well, some people will just reset their expectation dial and if you think the person you married is perfect, you probably need to do a little resetting exercise pretty quickly because nobody apart from Jesus Christ who walks this planet is perfect.

It's true. And the last thing is and this is what really takes courage and takes work and sometimes takes somebody to sit with you to help you do it is we can renegotiate our expectations.

See how? You know, when I gave my life to Christ I came from so far out it was unbelievable.

[18:17] I mean, I won't bore you with it now but honestly the trajectory of becoming a bishop in the church my trajectory is not normal. I mean, for a kicker as far as I can tell most of them were converts to a Christian faith like me.

You know, I was brought up in it. I was never brought up in it. But when I became a Christian I very quickly discovered what my life's mission was.

And everything that had been important to me ceased to be important to me and what God gave me as my life's mission became really important to me.

If we're living with damaged expectations then we are going to find life a little tricky.

Of course we know full well that throughout the whole arena of Christian history and even before that there were disciples who gave up. John chapter 6 and verse 66 very interesting numerology for those of you who are interested in that kind of thing 666 the mark of the beast it says that several of the disciples of Jesus gave up.

[19:37] And there are disciples of Jesus today who give up. And it's worth remembering isn't it that at the end of three dynamic years of Jesus healing ministry where thousands of people if you include the feeding of the 5,000 thousands of people were touched by the supernatural ministry of Jesus.

There were only 120 people left immediately before the day of Pentecost. You can read about that in Acts chapter 1.

And there is the likelihood that some of you will give up and I hope and pray that you really won't. I want you to just focus for a moment as I come to an end on some things that you could do which might help some of you make a massive move forward in your spiritual life.

First thing is this. You will never deal with disappointment unless you try and feel it strongly. Let me say that again. You will never deal with disappointment unless you can feel it as strongly as you can.

If you just allow it to gnaw away at you in a kind of low level way that's exactly what it will do and it will stay with you for the whole of your earthly life. If you can feel it strongly then you might be able to let go of it.

[21:10] Second thing you could try is this. Like the psalmist. You know what I love about the psalms is how outrageous people are. You know we Anglicans come together and you're oh mighty God blah blah blah yada yada not the psalmist.

You know in the Hebrew there's one psalm where it says in the Hebrew where the hell are you God? You know are you stuck in the loo? We need to bring those strong feelings before God. Sometimes they're better said to God than to someone you love as a matter of fact. And let them kind of sail with him. God can deal with your disappointment even if you can't.

The third thing is remember with God all things are possible but not all things are probable. You know this is one of the things where I think people of faith live in a kind of shadow.

On the one thing wanting to believe that with God all things are possible and by very definition because God is who God is all things must be possible but why doesn't everything I want to happen happen?

[22:27] You know why haven't I got a yacht? You know why am I not driving around town in a big beamer? You know why do I still struggle in so many ways?

I don't think we should ever lose sight of the fact that with God all things are possible but we should also work out that what's probable is that what God might do for me is more likely to be driven by my own ego and self selfishness than it is by a genuine desire to see God's will done in my life.

Fourth thing is really important. You know I really don't like to hear preachers who will tell you that if you trust God your life will become comfortable and all your problems will be over and it doesn't work like that does it?

Trusting God is not always the most comfortable option. You ever seen that picture of Saint Sebastian? You know this is one of God's faithful soldiers and servants and the most commonly

known seen picture of Saint Sebastian is there's this guy nailed to a cross like Jesus was except that somebody's fired about 28 arrows through him while he's on the cross.

You're like I wonder if Saint Sebastian was feeling comfortable at that moment. God doesn't promise you an easy life.

[24 : 03] he promises you a fulfilled life and you need to think about that. The fifth thing is always be open to a new move from God and the sixth thing is hang on in there please.

I'm going to close with a story about I say he's a friend of mine and I probably haven't seen him for 37 years now. We're that close. And he was a licensed lay minister in the church where I was a curer.

And he was married and they had their first child and this child was severely severely disabled child.

For the first year of this child's life he virtually never stopped screaming. all through the night really difficult stuff. And you know there's this kind of drip feed from the doctors about quite how acute his condition was.

And they were told he would never live past the age of five. In fact he lived until he was 18 years old and then he died. One night it got so bad Colin went into Matthew's room and he picked up a pillow.

[25 : 37] He was about to put the pillow over the baby's head and suffocate little Matthew. They put the pillow on the baby's face and he heard a voice.

A voice said don't do that. This is my child. It's like you know maybe I need to change my medication.

Starts to press down on the pillow. The voice comes again. Don't do this. This is my child. They took the pillow away and it's like what was that voice?

So he went to see the local vicar. The local vicar said I think very likely God made a move in your life. It's like well why would God allow my child to be born like this?

The vicar said I cannot answer that question. But I think God's making a move in your life. The upshot it was Colin and his wife gave their lives to Christ.

[26 : 55] And when Matthew died at the age of 18 they told me that at Matthew's funeral Colin stood up and said the only thing that I got right with that little boy when he was first born was we gave him the name Matthew because Matthew was an evangelist and he led his mummy and daddy to Jesus Christ.

Listen to me. You got disappointment in your life that you're not dealing with. I want to plead with you. Do something.

Feel the disappointment. Try and hand it on. Speak openly and honestly with God. Let it go.

It may be most important and those of you who feel this will know it. It may be that you need a new move of God in your life and I can't make that happen.

all I can do is plead with you. Just be open to this God who can do a mighty move in your life and can transform the deepest parts of your disappointment in a way that you would never dare to ask or imagine.

[28 : 34] To him be glory. Let's not be part of that crowd that shouts Hosanna one day and shouts crucify just a few days later.