

# "Great Expectations"

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[0:00] Heavenly Father, speak in this place, in the calming of our minds and in the longing of our hearts, and the thoughts that we may form.!

The arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem just days before the crucifixion is often explained as a victory parade.

Yet that is far from the way Luke wants us to see this passage. As we look ahead to Easter, let's take time to perhaps re-examine this familiar story and allow it to re-format our expectations.

The difficulty we often have is that for many of us, Jesus is little more than a nice man. He's kind, he's gentle, one who remains calm, cool, and collected among excitable and emotional humans. But this passage in Luke's Gospel challenges our expectations and forces us to rethink how we view Jesus. What are the expectations in this passage?

[1:29] Firstly, there's the expectation of peace. It's easy to see why the people got so excited when Jesus arrived when he might have been Dan the donkey.

He came as one offering peace and they latched on to that promise. They didn't grasp the importance of this event. Because their own expectations were all they could see. I suppose their confusion is understandable. Notice what Jesus does. He gets on a donkey to ride into Jerusalem.

In Luke's Gospel, Luke doesn't go into as much detail about the importance of this event. But Matthew tells us it's a fulfillment of Zechariah 9, verse 9.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See your king comes to you, riding, righteous, and having salvation. This was a prophecy the Jews would understand, referring to the Messiah.

[2:43] The quick reading of this passage from Luke gives good reason. To hope. The Jews saw their long-awaited freedom from Roman tyranny.

They thought at last they would have a king over them who would not seek their destruction, but their peace. Their expectations dictated how to interpret the scene.

Their expectations included peace from oppression. Peace in their country. Peace in their lives. So it's understandable they were elated.

That they responded with worship. Their first response was to throw their cloaks on the ground. And this act of humility was reserved for the warrior king.

The only other place in the Bible where this act is recorded is in 2 Kings 9, when Jehu is appointed king of Israel. And he's sent off to kill Jezebel and the wicked leaders.

[3:43] Jehu's mission, his purpose was to destroy the wicked who oppressed Israel. And when the people remembered this, they laid their cloaks on the ground as an act of humility.

And here in Luke's gospel, the crowds respond to Jesus out of their own expectations. They think he's come as a conquering hero, as a reigning king.

They think he'll make their lives better. Their expectation is centered on their own comfort.

Their own perceived needs. They're missing what's most important. They didn't really understand the type of peace Jesus was offering them.

His peace was not one of destruction of their enemies, but his destruction for their sins. And not only do the cloaks indicate a false expectation, so does their praise.

[4:55] Again on the surface, it seems so good. As Jesus rises down the Mount of Olives towards the city wall of Jerusalem, he began to sing.

And what he sings is not that unusual. It's from Psalm 118. During this Passover season, there were six psalms used to celebrate Israel's freedom from captivity in Egypt. It was Psalms 113 to 118. They're called the Hallel Psalms. The songs of praise sung by pilgrims as they approached Jerusalem.

So the crowds were flocking toward the holy city in preparation of Passover. So their presence and the song would not be a surprise.

But one small change is made in Luke's gospel. The other gospels record what Psalm 118 verse 26 says.

[5:56] Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. However, picking up on the royal nature of this event, Luke tells us about those in the crowd who say, Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

How do kings, rulers, presidents move about these days? Well, they travel globally using highly secured, customized, luxurious transport, including specialized private jets and helicopters. They have a cavalcade of armored limousines, a huge number of bodyguards, hundreds of staff members, including medical personnel and so on. But how did the king who comes in the name of the Lord travel?

Jesus' arrival is vastly different. And the people do not fully understand it. The crowd's response here demonstrates their expectations, blinded them to the event.

The donkey in which he sat was not the stallion expected of a king. In order to conquer mighty Rome, a war horse would be necessary.

[7:22] Not a donkey. The donkey was reserved for ambassadors, priests, kings who were on a friendly, peaceful visit. It was not that only lowly people rode donkeys.

Kings would as well, but only in times of peace. And Jesus comes, offering himself as a king, but as a king who will bring peace.

What's more here, this is a donkey in which no one has ever ridden. The type of Jesus' transportation was new and fresh. This type of animal pointed to the purpose of his mission. Animals used in sacrifice were to be animals that were never yoked, never ridden. By using this colt, this donkey, Jesus points to how he will bring peace.

He enters Jerusalem offering peace. Not being the destroyer of Israel's enemies. Not being the destroyer of the Roman army. But by being destroyed himself.

[8:35] Riding this young, untamed donkey points to the fact that Jesus will be the sacrifice for their peace.

And Jesus comes offering not just peace, but he offers himself as their peace. And the song sung which greeted their Messiah point to the, well, the confused nature of their expectations.

While Luke here does not record the use of palm branches as some of the other Gospels mention, the psalm from which they sang tells us why the palm branches were used.

The song was the song the pilgrims sang as they rode up the final hill towards the gates of Jerusalem. And with them they brought the Passover lamb.

In verse 27 of Psalm 118, it says, With bows in hand join the festal procession. In Hebrew, this meant that the branches like a willow or a palm would be gathered and used to take the offering.

[9:50] The sacrificial lamb to the altar and tethered to the rings of the altar. And also the palm branches are really the ropes with which the sacrifice is tied to the altar.

So in our passage from Luke, the crowd's expectations for success, for peace from external turmoil blinds them to the reality. Jesus came not to free them from the temporal turbulence of troubled times, but from a far greater problem than the tyranny of Rome.

Jesus came to save his people from themselves. There's an expectation here of peace and quiet. What did the Pharisees expect from this king?

Well, the Pharisees' expectations were very different, but just as misguided. For them, peace was not the removal of unwanted rulers.

For them, peace was something to be maintained. Peace found in not overturning the apple cart. It was found in the status quo. The crowd's adulation was offensive to the Pharisees.

[11:12] It pushed the limits of toleration. It may have arisen from fear of imperial Rome's iron fist, squelching such adoration. It may have been

that Jesus' credentials did not match their expectations for what a Messiah should be.

This Jesus was a little too compassionate towards sinners. This Jesus was a bit too full of life for an ambassador of God. Not nearly somber enough for their tastes.

No, they wanted a manageable Messiah. One who would allow life to flow unhindered. To flow unhindered peacefully.

Jesus was too passionate for them. But Jesus would have none of their critical attitude. While the leaders wanted worship to be sedate, Jesus offered an unwelcome option.

In verse 40, I tell you, he replied, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out. What Jesus really means is if people don't praise God, the stones will.

[12:31] Well, at first this saying makes little sense. It's easily, so easily misunderstood. As did the young woman who became a Christian after a very difficult upbringing, a very difficult life.

And she understood the need for worship of God in her life. And after reading this passage, she had an idea. She searched the rocky shores or a nearby beach and found just the right kind of stones and rocks.

She sat down and painted pretty flowers and Bible verses on them so that the rocks and stones would be able to praise God. How sad.

She had misunderstood the passage completely. What the passage is saying is not that the stones will cry out that Jesus is the suffering king.

but that if we do not worship him, if we're not willing to submit our lives to him in gratitude, judgment will come.

[13:42] To see the stones will cry out, to see that destruction will come and the destroyed city will be a living testimony of the people's refusal to submit to Jesus and to worship him.

In Psalm 118, already mentioned, which the crowds just sang, is the familiar verse 22 which declares, the stone which the builders rejected has become the capstone.

And throughout the New Testament, this verse again and again points out how the leadership of Israel constantly overlooked the very one who could save them.

their sin, their hard heartedness would never allow them to see the solution to their problem of sin. But not only is Jesus the stone which the builders rejected, there's a quite literal fulfillment to this statement.

And Jesus elaborates on it in our reading from Luke at verses 43 and 44. The crying of the stones would be the sound of Titus' army, building siege ramps up the walls of Jerusalem in A.D.

[15:01] 70. And the Jewish historian Josephus, who was present during the destruction of Jerusalem, he describes in graphic detail how the 10th Roman Legion encircled the city for five months.

And when at last he broke through the walls, all the people within the city, men, women, and children who had not died from starvation or were consumed as food by others, were slaughtered as a testimony to future generations.

The walls of that great city were torn down. Not one stone remained in place, and those walls still cry out 2,000 years later.

Friends, what are our expectations of Jesus? How do we think he should react, or he would react to such a misguided, self-centered set of expectations?

The people, the leaders, both wanted a Messiah who would give them what they wanted, and they wanted peace, but they only wanted peace on their terms.

[16:27] Suppose at this point, we would expect Jesus to be very angry, to be very disappointed. After all, for three years, he taught people who he was, why he came, or even those closest to him, did not understand.

With that as a context, what would be our expectation of Jesus to these people who do not understand? He was not angry.

He wasn't disappointed. His immediate response is seen in verse 41. A response we may not expect. As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it.

On only two occasions are we told that Jesus wept. One was at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, when after Martha and Mary in tears of remorse and anger tell Jesus, if only you had been here, our

brother would not have died.

And on Palm Sunday, as he rides down the Mount of Olives and sees the city of Jerusalem laid out before him, he weeps again.

[17:55] Jesus weeps because he knows. He knows what nobody else knows. Verse 42, if you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes.

In stark contrast, contrast to the crowd's exuberance, Jesus mourns the destruction of these people. The first response of Jesus is not one of wrath, but sorrow. sorrow for the wrath that will come against all those who reject him. There's no delight in his wrath, no vengeful pleasure, but rather a broken heart, a broken heart for their inability to recognize the answer to their problems.

Their false expectations had so blinded their eyes that the peace which Jesus came to offer meant nothing to them. If you had only known what would bring you peace.

So how was that peace obtained? How can our expectations of Jesus be different from the crowd? The same crowd who had heard him preach, the same crowd who had seen many of his miracles, the same crowd who shouted Hosanna on Sunday and crucify him on Friday?

[19:35] What will keep us from worshipping a Messiah of our own making rather than the Son of God? It's by altering our expectations. It's found in aligning our desires for peace with the peace that God offers to us in Jesus.

Instead of wanting peace from their enemies, the crowd should have latched on to peace with God. Instead of maintaining a peaceful life, they should have allowed their lives to be disrupted by their own sinfulness.

Their perceived comfort was their downfall. Many people perhaps love to proclaim Jesus as their political saviour or the moral reformer.

But friends, peace is not found in changing the government in Downing Street or the president in the White House. Peace is not obtained through political, financial, or judicial reform.

We may crave for peace around us, but we need peace between us and God. We must see our need, our inability to save ourselves, and cast ourselves on Christ on Christ alone.

[20:58] In Christ alone my hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my song, this cornerstone, this solid ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm.

Without Jesus, we have no peace before God. We don't need to be saved from the terrors of political unrest.

we do not need salvation from financial ruin. We do not need rescue from violence and injustice, as troubling as they may be.

The ultimate concern we must face is how we can be rescued from the wrath of God. If we expect God to answer in those ways, the ways of the world, our praise will be misguided, our worship will be focused on ourselves.

And when that happens, it's the stones which will sing as they crush us in our rebellion. The peace which Jesus secured came at a tremendous cost.

[22:08] The cost of his life sacrificed for us. We may hail Jesus as conquering king, but if we fail to embrace him as the suffering servant, we are no different from those who reject him.

We are only chasing after the delusions of our own expectations. We should not be like the crowds ascending to Jerusalem that day, excited, excited about seeing their own expectations fulfilled, their lives made easier, peace coming in their time.

Rather, we should accept God's terms of peace. On this Palm Sunday, will we lay down our expectations of what Jesus needs to do for each one of us and see our need of him?

The king has come. The king has come to his rebel subjects and offered peace on his own terms. The terms of peace are simple.

We should lay down our arms of our own self-righteousness, our own self-sufficiency and admit we're defeated if we have not accepted Jesus as our lord and king.

[23:33] Then, and only then, can we accept our full and free pardon from all our sins and we can sing the joyful song of peace in heaven.

Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. And as we do so, we can then welcome the triumphal entry of our saviour into our lives now and until the day returns or calls us home.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we join in the praises of those who greeted you on that first Palm Sunday. And as they blessed your coming and spread garments and palm branches in your way, make each one of us ready to lay at your feet all that we have and all that we are, that we too may bless your coming in the name of the lord, in Jesus' name.

Amen.