

# Great Expectations

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[ 0 : 00 ] May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.

Amen. Amen. Good morning.

It's good to be here at St. John's. It's always a delight and an honor to be invited to open God's Word. So I'm grateful to your rector and to your pastoral team for this opportunity to speak of God's Word with you.

It's an honor and a joy to be in the presence of the good folk of St. John's Shaughnessy. Many of us across the country have taken great courage by your bold stand, which became most public. Along with others in this area on June 15, 2002. And has continued daily since then. Now six years plus. And the beat goes on.

[ 1 : 10 ] I'm honored to be at St. John's. And as National Director of the Anakin Network in Canada, I do bring you greetings on behalf of the congregations that now span the continent from coast to coast.

As of today, Bishop Don would have been meeting with a new congregation in St. John's. And so that there's growth happening. And I bring you greetings.

We consider you to be our church, lead church in so many ways. And one of the things which is so clear is that week in and week out, the Word of God has been faithfully preached down through the years.

In season and out of season, as the scriptures speak about. And so for me to be here and to continue in that with you is a great delight.

I'm grateful too to be able to speak on this brief portion of scripture. Ephesians 3, 20 and 21. It's found on page 182 in your Pew Bibles, New Testament portion.

[ 2 : 13 ] I apologize. I did my preparations in the New International Version. So there will be variations from time to time. But I hope that it won't throw you.

You'll do fine. I believe that this passage is timely. Because you as a people, I know, have been in a state of readiness to stand for the gospel over these past years.

And the reality of the possibility of the growing tension and, you know, things being made even more real that lies before you.

My prayer is that this brief passage and the meditation which we'll think about it will be of encouragement to you. As leaders and people of St. John's, as you face today and tomorrow and we with you.

I am delighted that you're in this series of sermons on Ephesians. Ephesians actually is one of those passages which divides pretty well.

[ 3 : 23 ] The first three chapters are the purposes of God expressed fully in the person in life and death, resurrection and ascension, and to come, his return in Jesus.

And so the first three chapters is this banquet whereby Paul, he stands in awe that the mystery should be revealed to the likes of him, the least of the apostles, the chief of sinners.

But sure enough, the clouds were parted and he saw in Jesus, the full purposes of God. And that out of this most unlikely stuff, which is people, you and me and others, that God should have a plan in Jesus to dwell in our midst and to manifest his glory.

Paul stood amazed at that. And not only was he amazed that God should do this in Jesus and week by week. And I listened to some of the last four or five sermons and you are truly blessed.

I know you know that. You are truly blessed in the preaching team which delivers the word week by week. And I know you would have been proud and I'm sure you were proud that your rector, David Short, opened up the word at Gafcon.

[ 4 : 44 ] And it was, for those of us who have heard him from time to time, it was so significant. And so you are blessed.

And as we think about this Ephesians passage, part of what I think Paul is thinking about is the wonder of not only the glory of what God has in mind through Jesus, but the hopelessness of humankind.

This is a before and after story, if ever there was one. So it is, for instance, in Ephesians 2, you looked and, you know, in the first ten verses of Ephesians 2, how in the first three verses, Paul described all people in this situation whereby we're literally sitting ducks to our sinful desires. Under the thumb of the evil one, the prince of the power of the air, ruling in our lives. And by nature, objects of wrath, he says. That sums up our condition and our life.

And yet to people such as us and those described in those first three verses, God who is rich in mercy, by his grace in Jesus, by his death, by his resurrection, by his ascension, picks up the likes of you and me, plants our feet on a rock, as it says in Psalm 40, puts a song of praise in our mouth, and allows us to picture God's riches in kindness unfolding day by day and will for all eternity experience them.

[ 6 : 20 ] More than that, and maybe this is the biggest surprise of all, we who are the objects of wrath, suddenly in verse 10 are described as we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works that we should walk in them.

What a transformation. What a glorious before and after, if ever there was one. And if that was not good enough, he continues in the rest of the chapter, Ephesians 2, and talks about a people, the Gentiles.

And whether or not you're Gentile or Jewish by background, it speaks to our situation. And what does he say? Today, he says that we were those who were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope, without God in the world.

A people whereby the door is slammed closed, without hope, without God. But then in Jesus, he says in verse 13, I think it is of Ephesians 2.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. The great wall which separated us was something that we could not get through or around or over.

[ 7 : 47 ] You know some of the choruses which speak about that. Just an impossibility. In Jesus' bloodshed, that wall is destroyed and made as nothing.

Or in the picture of a door closed. Revelation 4 talks about the door wide open. And the Apostle John hears a voice that says, Come up here.

And he does. Because the door access to heaven to the Lord Jesus is made possible in his bloodshed. This is a glorious story, not just of individuals, but of a people.

As I think one of the preachers a few weeks ago spoke about, Paul was obsessed with the church. As is Jesus. The Jesus who said to Peter, I will build my church.

And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. So this vision that God purposed, and Ephesians 1 through 3 is all about his initiative.

[ 8 : 49 ] He chose. He elected. It was his pleasure. He chose to do it. All in Jesus. His actions, but amazingly in us.

Now we live in a pretty cynical age. We know sales pitches when we hear them. We're well aware that it's possible for some in eloquence to paint a picture which is glorious.

Which you can almost salivate. You can taste it. You can think about it. It's amazing. But sometimes it's hollow. And from where we are and to that picture is an impossibility.

It's to that kind of condition that Paul finds it necessary, and in fact it just flows from him, that he gives these two brief words.

Now, the before and after that he talks about in Ephesians 1 through 3, he's now about to move from the theology, from the truth of the purposes of God and Jesus, to the how shall we then live, which is chapters 4 through 6, which you have to look forward to.

[ 9 : 58 ] But there's this bridge, having expressed what he still cannot and will never get used of, stands in awe of. First of all, in verses 14 to 19 of Ephesians 3, he prays as he had in Ephesians 1, 15 to 22, essentially praying that the eyes of their hearts would be opened, that they would know what is impossible to comprehend, but is possible to experience.

You see, when your eyes are opened and you see Jesus, that's where transformation happens. That's why in 2 Corinthians 3, Paul could say, Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

But we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed from one degree of glory to another. That's why in 1 John 3, he speaks about, We don't know what we'll be like, but we know that when we see him, we'll be like him.

Therefore, everyone who has his hope fixed on him purifies himself, even as he is pure. The key to change and transformation is an accurate view of Jesus, who he is, and what he's about.

But in the midst of that, there is this before problem, and there's the vision of where we're heading. The question is, can he do it?

[ 11 : 21 ] So we get to verses, would you look with me to verses 20 and 21. I'm reading it in the NIV, and I like the NIV in this, because it puts the him and able closer.

Now to him, who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

Amen. To him is glory.

It's interesting that as Paul heads towards the practical, the how-to, the implementation of the gospel, he doesn't want us to miss who's doing it, where the power comes from, who is the one who actually does it.

And so he wants now to him be glory. Don't get mixed up when we start talking about how shall we then live. Remember who is doing it. I have a friend, not a close friend, but a person I know who memorized the gospel of Mark and would in one hearing recite the gospel of Mark.

[ 12 : 40 ] It's an amazing thing. And maybe you've seen people do that, or the gospel of Luke.

Those are the two that I have seen performed. One of the things this guy said, his name is Rob, is that what was interesting to him as he was in the process of memorizing the gospel of Mark, that even in the English, that at times when the narrative was not even speaking about Jesus, about what he said or what he did, the way the words are fashioned and crafted, you're always aware that at least in the periphery, it's all about Jesus.

And Mark never loses sight of this is the Son of God, and this is the gospel of the Son of God, which he begins Mark 1 with. And so it is that Paul similarly wants us to understand to whom does the glory reside, and to whom do we trust and depend upon.

But the question is, is it possible to get there from here? Can we get to the place where that vision is realized in our existence?

The answer is yes, because of whom he is. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.

I have meditated on the ability of God, the fact that he is able, and I submit to you, and I'd like to invite you to think about this, that in fact, this is a conversion of the Holy Spirit that is required of us.

[ 14 : 17 ] That in fact, the flesh, our human nature is loathed, despite lots of data and ammunition to the contrary, loathed to believe that he is able.

We need to, for a miracle of God's grace in our life. Now when I look at you today, you're alive, you're joyful, you're a mighty band of pilgrims, and I think you're going to be great, you're going to do fine, whatever may come your way.

But my prayer, and I believe your need as mine, is to be deeply convinced, converted, to an awareness that he is able.

See, the conviction that he is able is the thing that propels the people of God to bold obedience. It's the thing that causes us to be extravagant and to have a high sense of our calling.

It's the conviction that gives us power to live out what only he can do in us and through us. The resurrection, Paul says in Ephesians 1, and it's again the sweep of scripture, is the proof positive that he is able.

[ 15 : 35 ] Maybe you'd like to look back to Ezekiel 37, and I don't know what page it is in your Old Testament, but if you can find it, way to go. If you can't, just listen to this, and you'll do fine.

Ezekiel 37 is, Ezekiel brought into this valley of dry bones. And the dryness of the bones is the expression of the fact this is a hopeless situation.

It has a past, but there's no future. Both bones speak of a past. They don't speak of promise to a future. And to that valley of a great army of bones, Ezekiel stands, and he's asked, Son of man, can

these bones lift?

You remember Ezekiel saw them bones going to rise again. I said, O sovereign Lord, you alone know. Then he said to me, prophesy to these bones, and say to them, dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

This is what the sovereign Lord says to these bones. I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you, and make flesh come upon you, and cover you with skin. [16:48] I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord. And again, if you followed verses 11 to 13, that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.

Then you will know that I am the Lord. In other words, I'm able. When you see what I do, you'll understand who I am, and that I'm able.

In Mark chapter 6, we have the account of the feeding of the 5,000. What an extraordinary day that could have been.

Jesus said to the disciples, You feed them. And they, of course, were shocked. And then Jesus took what was offered, five loaves, two fish, and made it more than enough to feed 5,000 men, not counting the women and children.

After this great event, Jesus sent the disciples on their way in the boat, and he resided, dismissed everyone else, and then eventually, in the night watches, he sees what's happening in the storm, and he walks on the water.

[17:56] It says, Immediately he spoke to them and said, Take courage, it is I, don't be afraid. Verse 51 of Mark 6, Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down.

They were completely amazed. Listen to this, verse 52. For they had not understood about the loaves. Their hearts were hardened.

What's that about? I suggest to you that though they had experienced the miracle, and they knew a miracle had happened, they had not made the connection adequately between that event and who Jesus is, and therefore that he is able.

Their hearts were hardened. They could not make that connection, so when they see one walking on the water, this has nothing to do with the feeding of the 5,000. Their hearts were hardened.

He is able is a conversion of the heart that connects where I am now and where the Lord Jesus wants to take me in his purposes in the gospel.

[19:04] If you follow the words he is able, you will find some amazing things.

For instance, in Romans 4, Paul is using Abraham and David to show that even the great patriarchs of the Old Testament were justified by faith.

And so he says in verse 19 of Romans 4, without weakening in his faith, speaking of Abraham, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old and that Sarah's womb was also dead.

Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God. Listen to this. Being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

In fact, many of the versions say he is able to perform what he promised. See, Abraham was able to look at his condition and his dear wife.

[20:18] He was able to look ahead to all the nations of the world being blessed by his seed. He was able to see a multitude beyond the stars and the sand on the seashore and say yes because God is able to do what he's promised.

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 1, wanted to describe to this people that he was not able to come to when he'd hoped. He said, I want you to be aware of the struggles we had in the province of Asia.

In fact, they were so great that we thought we had within ourselves a sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on the God who raises the dead.

He has delivered us from such a deadly peril and he will deliver us. He is able. The God who raised Jesus from the dead routinely does miracles in the lives of people like you and me.

That's his nature. That's his heart. And when our hearts are made soft unlike Mark 6, we have no difficulty in believing the God who raises the dead is bigger than what it is that we're facing.

[21:35] And that extrapolating our demise is not the way ahead. Some of us today are hanging on for the promise.

we need to be reminded with Abraham and Sarah that God's able to perform what he promised. Some of us are extrapolating the unhelpful signs of whatever condition we're going through and have concluded it's over.

I may as well give up. He is able. The God who raised Jesus from the dead. Romans 8 says that same spirit is at work in you and me if you are in Christ.

Some of us have deeply rooted difficulties, issues, sin which like tentacles seem to refuse to let go of us.

And we've despaired. And we've wondered if we'll ever be extricated from that unhappy condition. the writer of Hebrews says he is able to save to the uttermost.

[ 22 : 45 ] That's the way the King James says it. The NIV says he's able to save completely. Some of us by the sheer weight of time marching on and the pressure of what it is that we are dealing with are despairing of our capacity to hang on.

are wondering whether it's possible that we'll capitulate. One of the delights that I found in terms of Gafcon, we'll be talking about that in a while, was that I believe that it was an assurance of the fact that there are a people, Anglicans around the world that will not capitulate to the pressure of a world which is trying to make the gospel an affirmation of our human condition as opposed to the gospel of transformation forgiveness for sin.

But what Jude says, to him who is able to keep you from falling, to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy, to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages now and forever more.

Amen. Dear friends, in the gospel of Jesus, in the one who is the Alpha and the Omega, in the one who thought this up even before the fall happened and already in Genesis 3 already had a plan for salvation and began the clock to tick towards the coming of Jesus and now the time until his return and in this window of opportunity there is an opportunity for the nations of the world to hear of Jesus but there's a battle that rages and we have that sense of oh are we going to make it or are we at the end of the day is at the end of the story going to be we crashed we flamed out we went down the good news of Ephesians 3 20 and 21 is now to him who is able hallelujah the wonder and the vision of the working of the Lord

Jesus is the works in us so that it's the that's part of what Paul is amazed at now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that works within us to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus or through Christ Jesus the great chapter on the resurrection because Ephesians 1 says it's the exertion of God's power in the resurrection which is the proof of the fact that he is able it's the proof of the culmination of the gospel it's the proof of who Jesus is Romans 1 4 says but more than that that he is able so the question comes to us in the light of his ability the fact that he is able how shall we then live well stay tuned to Ephesians 4 through 6 but in the meantime I want to refer to that great chapter of 1 Corinthians 15 which is the great chapter on the resurrection the one in which

[ 26 : 27 ] Paul could say that he's the chief of sinners but by the grace of God I am what I am and his grace toward me did not prove vain but the end of the chapter 1 Corinthians 15 58 it says therefore my beloved brethren be steadfast unmovable always abounding in the work of the Lord for as much as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord dear friends many of us across the nation are praying with you we are grateful for the lead way in which you are leading us we're so grateful for that we thank you we pray for you but we also charge you with the good news that he is able to keep us from falling he is the one who demonstrated his power in the resurrection and therefore dear friends of St.

John Shaughnessy be steadfast immovable always abounding in the work of the Lord for as much as you know because he's able that your labor is not in vain in the Lord let's stand to pray Lord we rejoice today that though you are able one thing that you're incapable of doing is being unfaithful one thing you're incapable of doing is denying yourself one thing you're incapable of doing is dwelling with sin and so we rejoice that in Jesus you have found a way to bring us home to make us your workmanship to make us a people in which you dwell to your glory Lord we offer ourselves to you this day as individuals and as a people we rejoice with confidence that you are able and we acknowledge regardless of the obstacles that we as individuals or as a people face that it is as nothing to you because you are God and you are able and we rejoice and we say we will walk with you and walk in those good works which you have laid before us for we pray in

Jesus name Amen please sit or kneel to pray Father this morning we thank you for how great thou art the one who is immeasurable beyond estimation and yet who also in Jesus became for us a defenseless infant and a crucified common criminal this great mystery is unfolded for believers its motive is love love alone that we may be reconciled become a friend of you the one true God may we nurture that friendship in our mind our emotions our body in thought but more so in action that singly and collectively we may glorify you and draw other sinners to the place of spiritual refreshment

Lord in your mercy Lord we thank you for your hand upon the global Anglican futures conference in Jerusalem for renewal there for fresh commitment for new found unity and common visions for the future we thank you for your protection of the delegates in the holy land and on their return we pray now that the Gafcon vision may be advanced with care to preserve unity and not to run ahead of the Holy Spirit's prompting we pray for your hand equally upon the gathering of Anglicans in Lambeth in London that posturing and politics may be swept aside by the breath of your spirit to convict and transform Lord in your mercy and lest we forget we thank you for the faithful believers who have been worshipping in and around Jerusalem Bethlehem Nazareth and the great cities of the Middle East Cairo Damascus Beirut Baghdad and Tehran but as a remnant under persecution for 2000 years father hear their prayer rescue them from their poverty and persecution protection defend their life and witness set aside their enemies do immeasurably more for them than they can ask or imagine

[ 32 : 49 ] Lord in your mercy and Lord we think of ourselves and how the events underway at Gafcon will play out in this parish and this diocese give us courage unity and commitment beyond our own means to follow you wherever it will lead that it may bring glory to you in the church and in Christ Jesus thank you for blessing this parish in so many ways and now confirm for us the way of leadership and service we bring before you our clergy staff and leaders that you may guide them and give them discernment in the challenging days ahead we pray for our friends in this parish who are sick

Caroline Edith Rowena Fiona Janet Harold Margaret and Marguerite and others Lord known to us this morning we pray especially for Karen and her family in their time of grieving we pray for our brother Mehran that justice will be done in his refugee appeal and father teach each of us to serve you more faithfully with all of our gifts and resources Lord in your mercy Amen