

Great Expectations of Jesus' Disciples

John 13:36–14:14

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Last December, Elissa and I got engaged. So, it's been a very exciting time for us. But, before I could propose, I had to know what I was in for. What could I expect from life together with Elissa? Did I have the right expectations?

Now, obviously I can't know everything that's coming. That would make me omniscient, which I'm not! But I at least needed to know what I could about Elissa, and Elissa needed to know what she could about me. Going into marriage with the wrong expectations would lead to serious trouble!

The same can be said for many things in life: going into business, going on an overseas holiday, taking on a major project like a renovation, or even stepping out onto the mission field. We need to know something about what we are in for. We need to have the right expectations, otherwise we'll be in trouble.

It's the same when it comes to being a disciple of Jesus. We need to know what we're in for and if we have the right expectations. It's a good question to ask. It really doesn't matter whether you're thinking about following Jesus or if you've been ministering for Jesus for the past fifty years. What are your expectations as a disciple of Jesus?

This is a question that the first disciples had to grapple with. They were people of their day, and so, it's helpful to know something about their day as a backdrop to what Jesus says to them.

At the time there were many expectations around the Messiah - a kingly saviour. Some of these expectations were quite political. One of the expectations was that the Messiah would kick the Romans out who were occupying the Jewish land at the time and re-establish the sovereignty of their nation.

So, when Peter asks Jesus, “Lord, where are you going?” the question is laden with political expectations (13:36). Peter wants to know how this great restoration of his nation will begin. What will Jesus do to start the process? Jesus blows Peter’s mind when he says to him, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.” There is nothing in Peter’s field of knowledge that he can connect this to. He doesn't know what to do with what Jesus has told him.

Peter anticipates following Jesus into some political struggle, even if it meant dying (v. 37). But he hasn't understood that Jesus isn't about to go into some political struggle. Jesus is about to go into a spiritual struggle via the cross so that Peter and all of Jesus' other disciples, including us, can have our sins forgiven and experience fellowship with God.

The issue for Peter is, he has the wrong expectations of being a disciple. When these expectations aren't met, he is going to deny ever knowing Jesus - three times (v. 38)! Peter has the wrong expectations and he's heading for trouble.

So, if the disciples could not expect a political struggle, what could they expect? The answer is in 14:2–3. “My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

These verses have been used at funerals, and we may find comfort in the idea that our loved one has a place with Jesus in heaven. But, as much as that is true, that's not what Jesus is saying here.

The picture that Jesus gives here is one of family. But we miss it because of a difference in culture. In our culture when people marry, they usually move away from their family of birth. Not in Jesus' culture. If you owned land and your child married, you would build another dwelling on your land, and your child and their spouse would live in that dwelling and continue being part of the family as an addition.

The point that Jesus is making is that he has not come to lead a political struggle as the disciples had expected. Jesus had come to enable people to become part of God's family.

Again, this would happen when Jesus returns to the Father via the cross. That is where Jesus is going, and this is why they can't follow him. This is why Jesus can say that they know the way because it's all about him.

The disciples still don't understand this as they hang on to their hopes of liberating their nation. Thomas speaks up and says, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (v. 5). But being a disciple of Jesus is not about liberating nations. Jesus is about reconciling people back to God. You want to know the way to God? It's Jesus. You want to know the truth about God? It's Jesus. You want the life of God? It's Jesus. Everything that is required to be part of God's family is in the person of Jesus (v. 6).

But, even knowing this, we can feel we need more than Jesus to have all there is to being his disciple. That we need to have a certain spiritual or mystical experience, or have some secret knowledge or special ability.

This was where Philip was in his understanding. He has had something of a revelation and realises that being a disciple is about being in relationship with God, and not about liberating his nation. But he's yet to understand that everything he needs for a relationship with God is in the person of Jesus. So, Philip asked Jesus to show him the Father (v. 8).

What Philip is asking is to have an experience of God apart from Jesus. But to look away from Jesus is to look away from God. To desire something other than Jesus is to desire something other than God. Philip is yet to understand that there is nowhere else to look apart from Jesus (vv. 10–11).

When we take seriously that everything we need for our relationship with God is in Jesus, Jesus says we'll be doing greater works than him (v. 12). I don't know about you, but I haven't resurrected anyone from the dead. So, what's Jesus on about? Jesus' mission is to reconcile people back to God. That's huge!

Never underestimate the enormity of that. And next week you'll hear how that's even possible. But the possibility of us doing this starts with Jesus going back to the Father via the cross. Because of Jesus, we get to see those rooms in v. 2 being filled by people who are reconciled to God. Because of the reconciliation we have with God, Jesus promises that the Father will do anything we ask to that end so that he will be glorified (v. 13).

That's what the disciples could expect.

To expect anything else would only lead to trouble.

Like the first disciples, we are also people of our day. In our day, affluence, success and comfort are highly valued. So, we can tend to bring these into our relationship with Jesus and expect him to give them to us. Without a doubt, life has the potential to run smoother when we obey what Jesus taught us. Especially when we extend God's grace and forgiveness to one another. But we shouldn't expect this will always happen. Listen to how the Apostle Paul described his experience of being a disciple:

“Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; ...

“in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches” (2 Cor 11:24–28).

**Does this sound like a life of affluence, success and comfort?
No, of course not! But Paul learned to be content because he
knew that being a disciple wasn't about affluence, success,
and comfort. So, what is being a disciple about?**

When Jesus had finished talking with his disciples, he prayed. The first thing that Jesus prays for is that his Father would glorify him because the Father has given him authority to give eternal life (John 17:1–2). So, what does it mean to have eternal life? Jesus tells us quite plainly, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (v. 3). Eternal life is knowing God and knowing Jesus. It doesn't get any more complicated than that!

What can we expect as disciples? To know God and to know Jesus. This is quite apart from any circumstances that we may experience. Whether you have everything, or you have nothing, you can expect to know Jesus. Whether you're fit and healthy, or sick and suffering, you can expect to know Jesus. Whether you're very much loved, or very much alone, you can expect to know Jesus.

If you are expecting anything else, you're going to be disappointed. So, if you are struggling in your experience as a disciple, maybe it's worth stopping to ask, what are your expectations? Maybe it's worth asking what are you really hoping for? Did Jesus really make that promise? Having the wrong expectations will only lead to trouble.

Maybe it's time to abandon our worldly hopes and return to God's word as his disciples. Maybe it's time to rediscover the Jesus of the Bible and behold the grace and mercy of being reconciled to God through him. That we as sinners, who have hurt God over and over again, can be in relationship with him.

Maybe instead of chasing the latest spiritual craze or experience, we learn to be content knowing that we are part of God's family and have a home with him. Maybe instead of seeking our comfort, we should seek the salvation of others and tell them about the forgiveness and reconciliation that's available to them because of Jesus. These are the great expectations of Jesus' disciples.

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