

Unfulfilled Expectations

Matthew 11:1-6

Intro

As we read the Bible, we realize that ***unfulfilled expectations*** are common in the lives of believers...

- A quick review of some of the Old Testament's greatest heroes reveals that ***unfulfilled expectations*** are an unpleasant reality in this fallen world...

Let's start with Job...

Job faithfully served the Lord and continually interceded for his family...

- Yet Job lost all of his possessions, his 10 adult children were killed in the same incident and Job's wife — in her grief — turned against him...

To add insult to injury, Job was then tormented with physical ailments and incessantly interrogated by 3 so-called friends who continually blamed him for all that had happened...

Next we come to Abraham...

Abraham was famously promised both ***land*** and a ***son***...

Ironically, Abraham never personally received the land — instead, it was given to his offspring 100s of years later...

- And God's promise of a son took so long that Abraham and his wife, Sara, carried out a sinful plan for Abraham to conceive a son with Sara's maidservant, Hagar...

Next we turn our attention to one of Abraham's great-grandsons — Joseph...

Joseph *was given visions by God that promised a bright future and great honor...*

- And yet he was betrayed by his jealous brothers and sold into Egyptian slavery...

Though Joseph remained faithful to the Lord in the midst of difficulty, Joseph was falsely accused of sexual assault, was imprisoned and was forgotten for years...

Several centuries later, Moses came onto the scene...

Moses *was called by God to deliver the nation of Israel from Egyptian slavery...*

- And though Moses eventually submitted to this calling, it took *four decades* of preparation...

When Moses took on the mantle of leadership, it included wandering in the desert for 40 years with a hostile and ungrateful people...

- To make matters worse, Moses failed to enter the Promised Land because of his disobedience at Kadesh...

Next we come to the most famous king of Israel — David...

David *was anointed king of Israel as a young man and heroically killed Goliath in an epic one-on-one encounter...*

- And yet David was forced to spend years running for his life, hiding out in caves with a variety of outcasts as he waited for God to fulfill His word...

Now we come to the prophets...

And it could be argued that *every OT prophet suffered unfilled expectations* — but let's simply consider two examples — *Jeremiah & Hosea...*

Jeremiah *faithfully proclaimed God's word and as a result endured humiliation, opposition and imprisonment...*

- And perhaps most tragically, there seemed to be no real change in the people that Jeremiah ministered to...

Hosea *was a prophet who was instructed by the Lord to marry a prostitute so that his marriage might illustrate Israel's unfaithfulness to the Lord...*

- And because of his wife's infidelity, Hosea didn't even know if he was the father of the children his wife gave birth to...

Now, this unhappy list is by no means complete — believers throughout human history have felt the *painful effects of unfulfilled expectations...*

- But it could be argued that no one felt the sting of ***unfulfilled expectations*** in the way that ***John the Baptist*** did — because no one else was called to be *the forerunner of the Messiah...*

So, as we turn our attention to John the Baptist this morning as we continue our study of the Gospel of Matthew, it is my hope that we will gain ***insight*** and ***encouragement*** as we seek to deal with our own ***unfulfilled expectations...***

So, please follow along as I read the passage that we will be studying this morning...

Matthew 11:1-6

1 Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities.

2 And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples

3 and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

4 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see:

5 The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

6 And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

Let's move into our first section...

1) Our Doubt (vs 1-3)

Now, I think it would be helpful to begin this section by reminding ourselves of the Angel Gabriel's prophecy regarding John the Baptist that is found in...

Luke 1:15-17 *[turn there]*

15 "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

17 He will also go before Him [the Messiah] in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

- [expand on the details of this prophecy — John was blessed with an amazing calling...]

Now, when the time came for John the Baptist to step into public ministry, he had a huge impact on the people of Israel...

- John offered a baptism of repentance for those who were seeking God and John fearlessly rebuked hypocritical religious leaders..

When we consider the resumé of John the Baptist it's truly amazing...

- ***John was the forerunner of the Messiah that was predicted by the Prophet Isaiah...***

John had many disciples and wielded great influence in the region...

- ***John had the incredible privilege of baptizing the Lord Jesus Christ in the Jordan River...***

And as the Lord Jesus came up from the waters of the Jordan, John both heard the Father's voice and saw the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus in the form of a dove...

So, it is absolutely certain that John the Baptist's ministry was ***absolutely unique*** — *no other person in human history has been blessed with doing the things that John did...*

- *Unfortunately, as wonderful as John's ministry was, tremendous difficulty was on its way...*

When ***certain things happened*** and other things ***didn't happen***, doubts began to creep into John's mind as a result of his ***unfulfilled expectations...***

With this in mind would you please turn back to Matthew 11...

1 Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples,

This is a reference to all that the Lord Jesus had taught the 12 disciples in **Matthew 10...**

- *And as we put the pieces together we realize that here in Matthew 11:1 the Lord Jesus is sending the 12 out on a short-term mission trip...*

Continuing on in Matthew 11:1...

Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities.

On His own, the Lord Jesus goes to *the home cities of the disciples* and shares the truth of God with the people He finds there...

APPLICATION — Jesus may have to reach your people — your family and your friends — apart from you...[expand]

Moving on to verse 2 we read...

2 And when John had heard in prison

Let's pause here for a moment — what is John the Baptist doing in prison?...

To find out, please turn to...

Matthew 14:3-4

3 For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife.

4 Because John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." *[lust, unbiblical divorce, adultery...]*

Now, let's turn back to Matthew 11 as we continue on in vs 2...

And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ,

To understand the context of the situation, we must remember that at the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, the people of Israel were *fervently expecting* the Messiah to arrive on the scene...

- ***And most Israelites were expecting the Messiah to overthrow Rome...***

They were hoping for a Messiah who would reign as King over Israel and give the nation the political and military power that it longed for...

[expand — the glory days of King David and King Solomon...]

After Jesus fed the 5000, we have this account in...

John 6:14-15 (NKJV)

14 Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

15 Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.

Now, as we put the pieces together, it seems that John the Baptist was caught up in this type of expectation as well...

- It is likely that he too was looking for a **Conquering King** instead of a **Suffering Savior**...

And this shouldn't surprise us because as we read the gospels it doesn't seem like anyone but Jesus Himself was expecting the Messiah to die a sacrificial death on the cross...

- So as John the Baptist sat in prison it is likely that he began to wonder: "**Why isn't Jesus doing what I thought He would do?**"...

And it seems certain that every believer has asked this question...

And even though it is understandable that we ask this question — the reality is that it is **the wrong question**...

- Instead of asking why **my expectations are unfulfilled** — I should be asking what **the Lord's expectations are**...

What is it that He **expects from me** in this situation?...

Continuing on in Matthew 11:2 and into vs 3 we read...

he [John] sent two of his disciples

3 and said to Him [Jesus], "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

the Coming One - *was a common title for the Messiah; the One whom people expected to come and rescue them...*

You see, many in that day expected the Messiah to play the role that Moses did, delivering the people from the oppression of an ungodly government...

In fact, God spoke these words to Moses in...

Deuteronomy 18:18-19

18 "I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.

19 And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him."

With that said, Jesus didn't seem to be fulfilling the role that the people thought the Messiah would fill — something didn't seem right...

And that lead John the Baptist to ask...

"Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

It seems likely that this question grieved the Lord Jesus because John was Jesus' forerunner...

- John was a man filled with the Holy Spirit from His mother's womb — and yet John begins to waver...

Now, the struggle of John the Baptist — the expression of his *doubt* — actually gives me hope — I find it to be a great encouragement...

- *Because it is not uncommon for **us** — as disciples — to find ourselves in a similar place...*

We feel imprisoned by our circumstances and we wonder:

"Jesus, are you who you say You are? — If you're in control, why are things the way that they are?"...[expand]

Now, as John the Baptist sat in prison, and as doubt began to take hold — his expectations remained unfulfilled...

- Things just weren't working out the way he thought they would...

But John did the right thing — he did what we should do when we are doubting...

- ***In the midst of his trouble he brought his doubts to Jesus...***

LESSON - Always bring your doubts to the Lord...[expand]

Please allow me to remind you of two familiar passages related to bringing our doubts to the Lord...

Philippians 4:6-7 (NKJV)

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

1 Peter 5:6-7 (NKJV)

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,

7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

*With these truths in mind, we move from **Our Doubt** to our second section...*

2) His Dependability (vs 4-6)

4 Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see:

hear - *Jesus' preaching and teaching...*

see - *Jesus' works...*

APPLICATION - In the midst of our doubt, we are to turn our attention to the things Jesus has said and to the things Jesus has done...

We do this, first of all, by reading the Gospels...[expand]

- Next, would be wise to remind ourselves of the things that the Lord Jesus has ***spoken to us individually***...[expand]

Also, we should take time to remember how the Lord Jesus has ***worked in our lives*** up to this point...[expand]

Now, let's look at how vs 4 leads into vs 5...

4 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see:

5 "The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

Let's go through the things the Lord Jesus lists here...

The blind see - *some had their sight **restored** and others were enabled to see for the **very first time**...*

and the lame walk - *those who had been physically disabled were able to move about freely...*

the lepers are cleansed - *lepers were delivered from the disease that not only destroyed their bodies but also isolated them from the rest of society...*

and the deaf hear - *those who could not hear were now be able to enjoy the voices of their friends and family...*

the dead are raised up - *Jesus restored the physical life of some who had died...*

and the poor have the gospel preached to them - *those who were at the lowest socio-economic level were offered the free gift of eternal life!...*

Now, all this is **wonderful** but there is **more to the story...**

- *The things that Jesus is relaying to the disciples of John is of special significance...*

Because giving sight to the blind, healing the lame, cleansing lepers, healing the deaf, raising the dead and preaching the gospel to the poor were all things that were prophesied of the Messiah...

- ***So, in His response, Jesus is reminding John of the scriptures that John knew so well...***

Jesus is reminding John of what the Messiah was sent to do...

To see this for yourselves, please turn to...

Isaiah 29:18-19

**18 In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book,
And the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and
out of darkness.**

**19 The humble also shall increase their joy in the Lord,
And the poor among men shall rejoice
In the Holy One of Israel.**

Now to...

Isaiah 35:4-6

4 Say to those who are fearful-hearted,
"Be strong, do not fear!
Behold, your God will come with vengeance,
With the recompense of God;
He will come and save you."

5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

6 Then the lame shall leap like a deer,
And the tongue of the dumb sing.
For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness,
And streams in the desert.

Finally, please turn to...

Isaiah 61:1

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me,
Because the Lord has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

Now, as we turn back to Matthew 11, please notice something very interesting...

In the message that Jesus sends to John, ***Jesus fails to mention anything about the opening of the prison to those who are bound...***

And this bring us to the heart of the issue...

How will we respond when we know that Jesus is able to do something about our situation and yet He refuses to do what we ask?...

This gets especially difficult for us when God seems unfair...

We learn of a miraculous healing of an individual from another family but our family member continues to waste away with disease...

- Others arrive safely at their destination but our loved one does not...

And on and on it goes — the seeming randomness and unfairness of it all threatens to overwhelm us...

- It is in these heart-wrenching seasons that the Lord asks us the simple question: ***"Do you trust Me?"...***

And that is the question that we must answer...

Do we trust that **Jesus** has the right to do things the way that He wants to do them?...[expand]

- Now, as specifically related to John the Baptist, does the Lord have the right to ***free one person*** and ***allow another person to die in prison?***...

[ex. Book of Acts — James is imprisoned and executed / Peter is imprisoned and miraculously set free...]

Now, in the midst of **unfulfilled expectations** — when we are wondering about Jesus' dependability — each of us must ask ourselves the following two questions...

Question #1 — Do I trust that Jesus loves me?...

love — genuine inner readiness and longing to secure the good of others...

- **Do I believe that the Lord Jesus is ready and longing to secure my good?...[expand]**

Question #2 — Do I trust that Jesus is sovereign?...

sovereign — Lord over all, the supreme ruler, the possessor of all authority in heaven and on earth...

- **Do I believe that the Lord Jesus is the Ruler of the Universe — that He has the final say in all things?...[expand]**

Now, let's say we truly believe that the Lord Jesus is dependable — that He loves us and that He is Sovereign...

- **The inescapable truth remains that believers *will suffer* a variety of tribulations, distresses, persecutions and disappointments...**

But what will we do when these terrible realities invade our lives?...

Will we surrender to the pain and dive into despair...

- ***Or will we trust the Lord Jesus even though none of our circumstances make sense?...***

This brings us to our final verse...

6 And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

It is interesting to note that the Lord Jesus introduces a new beatitude here...

blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.

blessed - *happy or joyful; content...*

offended - *stumbled, to become distrustful, to be repulsed...*

The Lord Jesus is basically saying:

"Joyful is the person who is not stumbled by Me. Joyful is the person who trusts Me even though he does not understand what I am doing or why I am doing it."

- ***And isn't this the essence of faith — trusting the Lord Jesus no matter what the circumstances may be?...***

I believe that this was the heart of Job in...

Job 13:15

“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.”

So, it seems that the lesson of Matthew 11:6 is difficult but clear...

In the midst of our doubt we are to trust in the Lord's dependability...

- *We are to trust that He loves us and that He's still in control...*

*We are to trust what He **has said** and what He **has done**...*

- *And we are to trust in what He **continues to say** and in what He **continues to do**...*

Unfortunately, it seems clear that John the Baptist — like us so often — was struggling with this issue...

- *John seemed to be **offended** with Jesus because of doubt...*

Now, without question, **doubt** is an unpleasant reality in the life of **every** believer...

- *Doubt is like that strange relative that none of the family members want to acknowledge — but there he remains...*

And similar to that difficult relative, doubt is here to stay...

- So the question is not, "**Will** we doubt?" but instead "**Where will we take** our doubt?"...

When we take our doubt to Jesus — when we compare our doubts with what **He has said** and with what **He has done**, we find that He is **entirely dependable**...

*We find that the Lord Jesus can be trusted in **any** and **every** situation...*

Conclusion

*So, as we begin to wind down our time together, it is vital that in the midst of **unfulfilled expectations** we focus not on the **why** but instead on the **Who**...*

- In other words, no good comes from asking **why** this or that difficulty is occurring...

On this side of Eternity, that will be an unanswerable question...

Isaiah 55:8-9

**8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord.**

**9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts."**

So instead of asking **why**, we are to focus on the **Who** of the situation — and that **Who is the Lord Jesus Himself...**

- We are to contemplate the hopeful question — “*What is the Lord Jesus going to do **through** this situation?*”...

What will it look like as **He** works this together for the good for those who love **Him**; for those who are called according to **His** purpose?...

- As we wrestle with the doubt that inevitably barges in through the door of **unfulfilled expectations**, may we move forward from the **why** to the **Who**...

Instead of demanding answers, may we instead seek opportunities to work alongside Christ as He seeks to redeem the fallen men and women of this sick and dying world...

And blessed are we when we are not offended because of Him...

Let's pray...