

Great Expectations

Text: Mark 6:1-6

January 16, 2011

Two construction workers sat down to have their lunch. One opened his lunch box and angrily screamed, "I can't believe it! Baloney again. I hate baloney sandwiches. This is the fourth time this week I've had baloney. I can't stand baloney!"

His friend tried to settle him down, "Take it easy. Why don't you just tell your wife that you don't like baloney sandwiches? Ask her to fix something else."

"Wife?" replied the first man, "I make my own lunch."

The fact is, most of the baloney in our lives, we have put there ourselves. Why is it that some of us seem to have a knack for limiting the possibilities in our own lives? Actually some of us have become so good at restraining the power of God in our life that it has become our spiritual gift.

Let's look again at the passage from Mark. In verse 2 we find that as Jesus taught in the synagogue, those who heard him were astounded. They said to each other "*Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands!*" They were truly amazed at the power of Jesus' teaching and the authority that he carried which seemed to come from God.

However, in an instant things changed. In a translation by Eugene Peterson called, The Message, it says: "*But in the next breath they were cutting him down: He's just a carpenter – Mary's boy. We've known him since he was a kid. We know his brothers . . . and his sisters. Who does he think he is.*" Now listen carefully to this next verse. "*They tripped over what little they knew about him and fell, sprawling. And they never got any further.*"

What does it mean to say that *they tripped over what little they knew about him and fell – never getting any further*? It means that they had preconceived ideas about what Jesus was like and those perceptions limited what he could do for them.

How do you limit Jesus? We all do it. How many times have you wanted to take a problem to God but thought that he wouldn't be interested or that he couldn't (or wouldn't) help? How many times have you given God a problem only to take it back?

How many times have you thought about tithing as a demonstration of your faith that Christ will take care of all your needs out of His abundance, only to never take that step of faith?

Like those hometown folks in Nazareth we often demonstrate by our actions that Jesus couldn't possibly be as great as he is – we have doubts about God. We doubt because we don't understand.

We don't understand the virgin birth.

We don't understand how someone could simultaneously be totally human and totally divine.

We don't understand how God can be three, yet one.

We don't understand how God could have created all there is and not be a created being himself.

We don't understand grace, forgiveness, righteousness, salvation, or heaven.

We don't understand that God owns all there is and that He is willing to share it with us.

We do understand how Jesus could have died from all of the torture and the crucifixion, but we don't understand how he was resurrected.

For many people, if they don't understand something they doubt that it is real. Like I said before: We don't necessarily communicate that disbelief with our words, because we don't want other Christians to know that we have our doubts. But we do communicate our doubts with our actions.

One other thing that you and I don't understand is the unlimited nature of God's power. We are finite – we have finite strength, finite endurance, and a finite ability to perceive in our minds. We even have a seemingly finite ability to tolerate, or even love, other people.

The people in the crowd fell because they could not get past their own limited ideas of who Jesus was. They had God in a box. This is what we understand about God. Beyond that, forget it. We don't want to be like them.

We desire to possess that inner eye of faith. Sometimes I hear people using an erroneous definition of faith: "The ability to believe in something without evidence." Faith is *always* based upon evidence, although it may not be in the form of scientific data. God's handiwork in creation; in the life, death and resurrection of Christ; in the miracles and growth of the first century church; and in the change that is produced in the hearts of converted men and women are all bits of evidence that God does exist and that he intervenes in the lives of people.

I want you to know today that God is knocking at the door to your life, to your heart, waiting patiently for you to invite him inside. We stand at the precipice of this New Year. Who do you want to journey through it with – a little God that you can understand and whose power is limited by your understanding...or an immensely awesome God who exists and works in ways you will never fathom, and whose power is limitless?

God can do powerful things in your life if you will only have great expectations of Him. Don't try to fit God into the small box of human understanding. Let your God be the big God that he is. Allow his majesty to overwhelm you at the break of each new day. At the close of each day

or week, look back and witness how, when you turned God loose in your life, remarkably unexpected things happened. These events are intentional...for they are put there by God to form you witness, your testimony, to share with other people.

I pray that you will allow the Lord to do the one thing that he alone can do for you. What is that specific thing in your life? He won't force Himself upon you. You must open your heart and your life to Him. And once you do...hold on!

Open the door to the Father by confessing your belief in his Son Jesus and then allow him to wipe you clean of all sin. Allow him to present you to himself under the righteousness of Christ. These are mind-boggling realities all by themselves. What other great expectations will you have of God? Don't fill your life with baloney this year. You may think that baloney is all you deserve. But how about leaving that up to God...trust in His grace.

I want to close by sharing the Scripture passage from Matt 16:13-19:

Listen in this passage to the difference in who Jesus is believed to be when the information comes from people, and when the identity information comes from God.

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

"Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."

Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven."

Again, I say to you: Don't go to the world for information about who Jesus is. Allow the Holy Spirit to move you to a place of true faith and understanding, and then marvel at what the Lord will do in your life.