

In many places throughout scripture, God tells us to be content with our lives. We should be content with whatever it is he has chosen to give us. We should be content with where we are, who we are, what is in our lives and how our lives proceed. He expects us to act, he expect us to fulfill the roles and responsibilities he gives us, but he also tells us that whatever is out of our direct control that he is ultimately responsible for. And so we should be content with what he gives us.

But saying you should be content and being content are two entirely different things. And I think, personally that a great deal of the difference between those two states has to do with our expectations. Set them too high and we end up disappointed even by good things that happen. Set them too low and yes you can end up pleasantly surprised at times, but you also end up with a bit of a pessimistic outlook on life.

So what do you expect from your life as a Christian? Many Christians the world over have set the wrong expectations. And some of them have made those wrong expectations quite public and popular. They promise health and healing. They promise freedom from burdens and troubles. They expect wealth and success to crown everything they do. This "success theology" was born in America and has proven quite popular here. Why wouldn't it?

That's just one example of how people take the message of God and turn it around to be about themselves and how great they are. It's really no surprise that some people come to those conclusions. God's word to us in the Bible is one of the easiest messages in the world to deliberately misunderstand. Why is that? Because everything God says from beginning to end runs completely contrary to our human logic and what our sinful nature *wants* to believe.

Our human nature only wants to think about things in terms of here and now, in terms of physical and not spiritual. This misunderstanding of God has been around since the first sin. We have it recorded for us in the Bible itself how God's nation of believers completely misunderstood what the Messiah was going to be like, and what purpose he was going to serve. When Jesus showed up, they all expected that he was going to make everything better right there and then. Feed them, heal them, kick out the Romans and make them a great nation. They didn't care about the real feeding and healing they needed, the healing that the Messiah actually came to perform. Just like today, their eyes were stuck on the here and now, only able to see and only wanting to see the physical, completely ignoring the spiritual. So it's no wonder that people even today get the wrong expectations about what a Christian life will be like. They forget that it profits us nothing to gain the whole world and yet lose our soul.

Now, as members of our church body I know you're not being taught these false ideas and expectations. And hopefully you've not drawn the wrong conclusions on your own about what a Christian life will be like. You don't have to think too hard about where you've been or come from to realize that as Christians this life can't really be called "easy". And Jesus today tells us to expect no less than that. Last week we heard how Jesus gathered his disciples and prepared them to go out and spread the good news of the savior. Continuing those instructions Jesus says, **"A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!"** (v24, 25) The point Jesus is making is obvious. Clearly you and I are the students, the servants. Jesus is the teacher and the master so it would be foolish to think we're above him and more to the point that we should be treated better than him. Well of course, we wouldn't presume to be. So when we look at how the world treats Jesus himself, those of us under him shouldn't expect any kind of better treatment. It's somewhat of a "duh" statement when you say it like that, but too often it goes forgotten when we set up our expectations for our lives.

So to properly remind ourselves, how was Christ treated? We need to be clear on this so we can set our expectations properly. Jesus, Lord of creation and God of all, was ridiculed, shunned, and attacked. He was accused of being in league with Satan, and rejected by some of the people who knew him best. And of course, he was eventually put to death. Somewhat grim to just think about it that way, but we should expect no different treatment by the world. This world is still corrupted by sin. Every person in it bears that taint of sin. And sin hates our God. If we bear his name, if we carry his message, then we should expect to be attacked by the world on account of his name.

Now it is highly unlikely that any of us here will be asked to die for our beliefs here and now. But we did make that promise at our confirmation, that we would suffer all, even death, rather than deny our Savior. God has allowed many of his believers to be put to death over the years for his name. We probably won't have to, but we shouldn't *expect* any special treatment. What we probably will suffer for the name of Christ (and many of us already have) is verbal and emotional mistreatment. We can be accused of being backward and ignorant for believing in things like gods and miracles in this age of science. We can be accused of being unloving and cruel because we don't want to let people live

the way *they* think they want to live. We can be accused of being troublemakers because we won't just live and let live. And we should expect that these things will happen when we bring the message of Jesus to the people who need it.

But the problem is, sometimes when you expect nothing but trouble...well it gives you every incentive to avoid it, doesn't it? After all, if I'm going to have to go through all of that to be a Christian, well it certainly sounds a whole lot easier to *not* be a Christian. Or at the very least to just keep quiet about it and avoid all this trouble. But Jesus' very next words tell us that that is not an option for us. He says, **"So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."** (v26-28). Jesus tells us to speak boldly what we have heard and not to be afraid of those who might attack us for it. They can only hurt our bodies. They cannot touch our souls. The only one we have to be concerned with is the One who can destroy both body and soul by sending it to hell. That's God, in case you missed that. God is the only one with authority over your soul.

The people of this world may think they have power over us, but they do not have any power that wasn't given to them by God, and everyone will have to answer to him in the end. Whatever the world threatens us with, it's nothing compared to what would happen if we give up on God. Without Jesus as our savior we don't measure up and we will be condemned like everyone else. But, if we keep Jesus as our Lord and Master then this is where our expectations come in handy. Because here we can expect the kind of treatment he got and look forward to it. We can expect that after we die here we will be raised to eternal life with God the Father. Jesus is the firstfruits of the dead, he is the one who did it first. But with him over us we can confidently expect the same treatment that he got. Expect that we'll have to suffer here for Jesus' name just like he did, but more than that expect that you will be rescued on account of his name!

But of course, we know our God is primarily a God of love. He doesn't want us to be afraid of what will happen to us here while we wait for that eternal deliverance. So Jesus next words to the disciples offer them comfort as they go to carry out their mission: **"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."** (v29-31). Sparrows were cheap, common animals at the time, most likely sold as food for only the very poor. And even today, no one really sets a high value on them. And yet God knows the movement of every one of them and not a single one falls to the earth without his consent. If that's true about sparrows, how much more so you. God has numbered the very hairs on your head. He knows your every movement, your every thought and he is personally concerned with everything that happens to you day by day. He does love you, he does care for you. He provides and he promises to protect.

But set your expectations of that protection properly. Understand God's priorities. He is most concerned above all about getting you to the end of your life on earth as a believer in Jesus, because only that way will you be rescued from sin and saved for eternity in heaven. If that path requires suffering at times, he *needs* to allow it for the sake of your eternity. And sometimes you may need to suffer so that someone else can learn about Jesus. Expect that parts of this life will be unpleasant, but when they come remember that God promises they all have a purpose.

The end of our reading today has Jesus offer one more word of both comfort and warning when he says, **"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven."** (v32-33). When the time comes to be judged, this is the only thing that will matter. And Jesus warns us that if we deny him, he will make no claim to us. And again, without Jesus on our side, we have to stand before God based on our own merits, and in his eyes, we don't have any. But if we acknowledge Christ, if we claim him as our own then when the day comes where we stand before the Father and he says to us, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" then that will be the time that Jesus speaks up and says, "Father, this one is with me."

Yes, we should expect that as believers in Jesus we will be treated no differently than Jesus himself was treated. But when set our expectations rightly, we can be content. When we know that our God is watching and caring for us, we can bear up under it. And we know that the alternative is far far worse. There may be times when we fail. Where we keep quiet when we should have spoken up. When we hide who we are in shame. Bring that guilt to the foot of the cross and Jesus will forgive that sin too.

We expect these things to come, but not that they will happen incessantly. As Jesus went about spreading the good news, many *listened* to him. And many were brought to faith by the power of the Holy Spirit. You can expect that too as you share your faith. So what do you expect from your life? It won't be perfect here and now, but with Jesus as your master, nothing out there can really hurt you. Nothing can take away your eternal reward earned for you. Claim Jesus as your own, and he will claim you before his Father. Amen.