

Series: THE BEST CHRISTMAS EVER?
Week 1- "Deal with Your Expectations"
Isaiah 9:6-7

Me: Years ago, my perfect Christmas... it was about the presents. As I grew and had kids... it was about them. Now, "Just leave me alone!" But it's more about family, relationships and my relationship with Jesus rather than just His birthday. It's more than just one day.

*What are you expecting this Christmas?
Will it be different from the last? Better? Worse?
When you think of the best Christmas ever, what comes to your mind? How would you describe it?*

We: People often expect too much from Christmas and when expectations aren't met they can become disappointed, frustrated, bitter even angry.

A former head of the Texas Employment Commission, said they had a hard time getting men to be department store Santa Clauses one year. The reason was the high percentage of children who were kicking Santa in the shins for not coming through the year before. They expected Santa to live up to his billing, and deliver the goods as they requested.

Bill Adler, in his book, Letters To Santa Claus, reveals the hostility children can develop because of their excessive expectations. One little guy wrote, Dear Santa Claus, "Last year you didn't leave me anything good. The year before you didn't leave me anything good. This year is your last chance."

False Expectations Can Blind Us To The Real Joy of Christmas.

Excessive expectation is the quickest way to the land of doubt, despair, and the drop out. We are bombarded with images and

portrayals of the ideal Christmas. From the big screen, idiot box and outlet malls the expectations are so pressed into our minds that it's nearly impossible to avoid them. We end up wanting more, longing for and expecting more out of Christmas than is humanly possible to attain. We set ourselves up for disappointment.

Here's a **News Flash: Christmas is not the way the truth and the life.** There is no promise that Christmas is the way, the truth, and the life. You cannot trust in it for the abundant life. Nobody's birthday-not even Christ's-can meet all of our needs, and it is a major emotional mistake to expect it.

Much of the depression at Christmastime is due to unrealistic expectations. We expect milk to stop spilling, and people who haven't spoken to each other all year to be friendly, and the whole world to stop the wars, murder, robbery, and all forms of evil, and we're shattered when we realize we can't even stop the spilt milk. It's depressing if you expect Christmas to make the world a paradise for you. It's unrealistic.

Psychiatry warns us of this. One psychiatrist wrote, "Any celebration that sets up such unrealistic, magical expectations is very unfair to human beings. People are pushed to deny the reality of their lives-their financial situation, their true relationships. There is almost a delusional mood."

In other words, people try to live in the realm of fantasy. They buy things they really can't afford. They pretend to be more loving than they really are, but it doesn't work very long, if at all. One writer says, "Seldom does reality measure up to the artificial and sentimental vision of Christmas which Hollywood, Hallmark Cards, the Chamber of Commerce, and our faulty memories create for us."

He says, if we dream of a white Christmas and it doesn't snow, then we are upset, for even the weather is against us. We go to get out the manger scene with the illusion it is ready to set up. But what

we find is a shepherd missing and a three-legged camel. Suddenly, it is no longer a manger scene, but a mangy scene.

I remember sitting down to read the Christmas story with the idyllic dream that the kids were going to listen with awe, as if they never heard it before. But they squirmed and kicked and complained, "When are we gonna open presents?"

I'm not trying to be overly pessimistic or to convince us that Scrooge was on the right track. But if we really want to experience the Best Christmas Ever, I'm suggesting this: Let's try to weed out the false and unrealistic expectations we have of the season and the day.

Expectation is not foolish in itself. There's a lot of enjoyable expectation that is a vital part of life and of Christmas. Christmastime is definitely special and unique among the holidays we celebrate. We don't start playing Easter songs weeks before Easter. There is no other holiday like Christmas, where expectation is so much a part of its celebration. We look forward to Christmas, longer, and with greater anticipation, than all other holidays combined. The expectation is more than half the fun. It's not that expectation itself is bad, it's the false expectations, the unrealistic ones that get us into trouble...

People Expected the Messiah King to be Something Else.

When He didn't fulfill their expectations, He was crucified and buried. Even His own disciples became confused and disappointed.

GOD: Here's what the disciples thought and here's what they expected...

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and *also* the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

46 Nathanael said to him, "**Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?**" **John 1:45-46.**

Other side of the tracks, nowhere town. Besides, the ancient scriptures predict Bethlehem as the birthplace of Messiah.

"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."

33 But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die.

34 The crowd then answered Him, "We have heard out of the Law that **the Christ is to remain forever;** and how can You say, "The Son of Man must be lifted up"? Who is this Son of Man?" **John 12:32-34.**

The death of Jesus meant He couldn't have been the long-awaited Messiah. Even those closest to Him were shattered by this revelation...

(Road to Emmaus) **"But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel.** Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened." **Luke 24:21.**

Where did they get these ideas?

Isaiah 9 and other OT prophecies. This is what the Jewish Leaders of Jesus day were expecting...

Isa. 9:1 But there will be no *more* gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make *it* glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

2 The people who walk in darkness

Will see a great light;

Those who live in a dark land,

The light will shine on them.

3 You shall multiply the nation,

You shall increase their gladness;

They will be glad in Your presence

As with the gladness of harvest,

As men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

4 For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders,

The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian.

5 For every boot of the booted warrior in the *battle* tumult,

And cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire.

6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;

And the government will rest on His shoulders;

And His name will be called **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,**

Eternal Father, Prince of Peace,

7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,

On the throne of David and over his kingdom,

To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness

From then on and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this. Isaiah 9:1-7

Context:

Isaiah wrote at a time when Israel was entering into very dark days. Israel was under the domination of the pagan nation of Assyria and Babylon was gaining strength and power as the next great enemy on the horizon.

So this is a prophecy of a coming deliverer, a king who would free them from their oppressors. It actually begins with ISA 7:14 which we now know was literally fulfilled by the birth of Jesus.

But it also had an immediate and partial fulfillment in the son who was to be born to Isaiah himself, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz was his name. "Virgin" = young girl and virgin until conception (Mary literally a virgin at birth of the Messiah).

This king's reign was for a time only, Christ will reign forever. And so the ancients correctly discerned this prophecy to be speaking of a future deliverer with, supernatural, Godly characteristics. They saw Him as a warrior King who would deliver them from all their enemies forever.

This is seen in the royal titles He's given here...

The first, "**Wonderful Counselor**," in this context portrays the Messiah as an **Extraordinary Military Strategist**.

The second, "**Mighty God**," indicates that God would energize Him for battle so that He would be a **Superhuman Warrior**.

The third title, "**Everlasting Father**," pictures the Messiah as a beneficent Ruler who demonstrates fatherly concern for His people.

OR... "**Father of Eternity**" is a better translation. Among the Jews, the word "father" means "originator" or "source." As such, His reign will be an eternal one. **Eternal Caring King**.

The fourth title, "**Prince of Peace**," indicates that the Messiah's

kingdom will be characterized by social justice and prosperity. **Provider of Perfect Peace and Prosperity.**

So, the ancients, up to and including the time of Jesus' own disciples, thought the prophecies were of a National Deliverer or Messiah who would free them from the bondage of other oppressor nations, smash all Israel's enemies and bring peace on earth, set up a physical and an eternal Kingdom. Their expectations were not false, just premature. The ancients and the disciples thought the prophecies were only of a National Deliverer or Messiah, but looking back, we can see there are two parts to His coming. First, He came and died for the sins of the world, but it is His second coming when He will set up His eternal Kingdom on earth. In His first coming, Jesus is a Personal Deliverer and a Personal Messiah.

When the Jews' expectations were not fulfilled, they rejected Jesus and to this very day, the majority of the Jewish people are missing out on the joy of walking with God personally because their expectations of a deliverer were not fulfilled in Jesus.

YOU:

"False Expectations can blind us to the real joy of Christmas."

The same can happen to us. We have expectations we hold onto. When they are not fulfilled, we become frustrated, disillusioned, discouraged, depressed even. Expectations of the perfect Holiday, the perfect Christmas day can set us up for a whole lot of disappointment.

You want the **Best Christmas Ever?**

Put aside your false and unrealistic expectations. It's Jesus' birthday we celebrate. Let's put your hope in the BOY rather than his day. Place your hope and dreams in Him rather than in the celebration of His Birthday.

“The Best Christmas Ever will belong to those who put their Hope in Jesus rather than in His Birthday.

Look at the prophecy in Isaiah again, Let’s see Why and How we can hope in Him. It’s all in His Name.

Wonderful Counselor – Is there any problem He cannot solve?
Confide in Him.

How?

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all generously and without reproach ... and it will be given to him,” James 1:5.

-God has the answer to any problem we may have, but He will usually not solve it without our involvement. We need to ask for wisdom, for what to do.

My Experience- Yellow Pad...

We can confide in Him as our Wonderful Counselor.

Mighty God – Is there any issue He can’t handle?
Trust in Him.

(To His disciples who asked, “Who then can be saved if it is difficult even for the wealthy?”)

“With men, this is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God,” Mark 10:27.

Also, (To Mary who asked the angel Gabriel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”)

“For nothing will be impossible with God,” Luke 1:37.

God can handle anything, but there is something we must do- we must trust in Him.

And Mary said, “Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.”

We can trust in Him as our Mighty God.

Eternal Father – Is there anything in your life He does not care about?

Lean on Him.

“Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? Matthew 6:26.

He feeds the birds and He will feed you too, but it’s still the early bird that gets the worm. “If one will not work,” the Bible says, “neither let him eat.” –in reference to the regular gathering of early Christians for their love feasts.

He has instructed us to pray, **“Our Father Who art in heaven... give us this day...” Matthew 6:9ff.**

We can lean on Him as our Eternal (Caring) Father.

Prince of Peace – Is there any conflict or turmoil He cannot calm?
Rest in Him.

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful,” John 14:27.

There is peace in Him, but we may need to do something ourselves in order to experience it. I think we need to actively seek it with prayer.

Philippians 4:6-7...

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 comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

If/When things get out of hand go to Him in prayer. But here’s an important key I want to give you. Don’t pray yourself into a hole- “Woe is me, I don’t know what I’m going to do Lord, this is too much, please help me, etc.” Rather, Pray with Thanksgiving...

“The Best Christmas Ever will belong to those who put their Hope in Jesus rather than in His day.

Realistic expectations of Jesus and they apply every day of the year as well!

As Wonderful Counselor, you can confide in Him.

As Mighty God, you can trust in Him.

As Eternal (Caring) Father, you can lean on Him.

As Prince of Peace, You can rest in Him.

But it begins with accepting Him. **John 1:11-12...**

He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. (False Expectations) 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.

If your Hope is in Jesus, it means you have received Him as your Savior; but not only that. It also means you are actively walking with Him. It's easy to forget this, especially as we're trying to navigate the hustle and bustle of Christmas with all its false and unrealistic expectations.

Don't just say you've received the Gift of Jesus, but then go and put Him on a shelf like some old and forgotten toy. Carry Him with you everyday. It's a daily, active walk with the Lord that will help you overcome the pressures and stress of Christmastime and of every time, everyday of your life. He has offered to walk with you and will live in and through you everyday.

I have said, prayer with thanksgiving is one way to do that. Let me give you another. Pastor Jon has mentioned the importance of the Fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5.

Gal 5:22-25...

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

We have been given the life of the Spirit of God- He lives within us. If we have His Spirit in us, let us also walk in the power of His Spirit. Why do we try to do this life on our own? You want the Best Christmas Ever? Don't try to do it in your own power.

These are qualities, characteristics of one who is walking in the Lord. They are actually His virtues, His characteristics that He gives to you.

They are the produce or fruit of His Spirit living within you. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Don't try to produce them. You can't. They aren't the fruit of trying harder! You can't produce these fruits anymore than you can produce bananas. Bananas are a gift of God and so is Love, and Patience and Kindness.

These are the fruit of the Spirit of God working in you.

He has already placed these qualities in you and makes them available to you. But you must take them down from the shelf and put them into action.

So, example. Things are not going the way you had anticipated on Christmas day. Don't pray for patience! He's already give His patience to you- just ask Him to help you utilize it. It's not yours, it's His patience we are utilizing and experiencing. If it's hard to love Uncle Bob- just love him in the love of the Spirit, Jesus has already given it to you! it's the love of Jesus you will experience, it's not even yours. He'll love Uncle Bob through you.

Need patience? You already have it, just use it.

Need love? Jesus has placed His love in you, take it off the shelf and use it.

Kindness, gentleness, self-control- no need to lose your cool, to melt down or blow up even. He's given you all these gifts. Take them off the shelf and play with them! What a great Christmas! It's His Birthday and we get all the gifts!

WE:

My Best Christmas Ever would be the one where everyone in my family has Put their Hope in Jesus their as their Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father and Prince of Peace. And they have not left Him on the shelf, but are confiding in Him, trusting in Him, Leaning on Him and Resting in Him. Walking with Him, exhibiting the Fruit of His Spirit flowing through them.