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Simply Jesus: Expectation and Disappointment

Simply Jesus Series
Matthew 11:2-19
Pastor Mark Kremer

I had high expectations for my honeymoon. You know, I had a brand new bride; I had a brand new car—one of those really cool ones where the front headlights popped up—and I picked up a brand new hotel in downtown St. Paul, Minnesota, to stay at for our first night. Somewhere in the middle of the night I heard a commotion in the hallway. I heard doors opening; I heard people yelling, "Fire". I opened our door and looked out and the hallway was just filled with what seemed like smoke. It was burning my eyes and people were saying, "Evacuate! Run!" and so Donna and I ran down, along with a whole host of very straggling looking people, twelve flights—it might have been thirteen flights—of stairs, down to the lobby in the middle of the night. And you've never seen such an odd-looking group of people. So, after about an hour down in the lobby, they came up and we learned that some kids had just set off the fire extinguishers in the hall and so it was the chemical that had filled the hallway. It wasn't really a fire but, when we got back upstairs, everything was covered with that white powder out of those things. I mean the bed, our suitcases; everything was covered. So we kind of went back to sleep and about six o'clock in the morning, when the morning manager came on, he decided to reset the alarm and it went off again. That time I said, "Donna, we're just going to die if it is a fire. I'm not going." (laughter)

Well, you know, the next few days we went up to the north shore of Lake Superior and had a wonderful time. It was after the rush of the season and we were kind of lonely up there. There were only a few old people in pie shops eating blueberry pie, and us. But we had a really nice time. There was no TV or radio up there back in those days and so we were just really enjoying ourselves. Then we came down into Duluth at the end of that, only to turn on the radio, for every flag was at half-staff. That was when the Soviets had shot down that Korean airliner and everybody was talking about World War III and we thought, "Oh my goodness!"

We came to Nebraska for a reception in my home church and, on our way back, after a great time, we stopped in a little town in Iowa, headed back to the Twin Cities and, for lunch on our budget, it was McDonalds. And we got our lunch and came out to the car and there was a little thunderstorm and Donna said, "You know, at least it doesn't look severe." Well, we weren't five miles out of that town and we were in a tornado warning! We were seeing trees blow past our little car and all of a sudden these gargantuan hail stones—like Hercules was throwing them out of the sky—began to just pelt our car. Our windshield was smashed; our car was completely dented up. We covered our faces as the glass started flying and just shattered and webbed in the car. We covered our faces with some blankets until it kind of passed, and then we tried to go to the next little town to find a place to get out of the rain because now the rain's coming through the windshield. There's only one little place in the whole windshield that wasn't shattered, and so I was leaned down like this and, in driving rain, trying to drive down here. Donna is kind of wanting to look out the side window but it's pouring rain and the only place we could find to pull in to get out of the rain was the refuse dock of the rendering plant where they take dead animals (laughter)—at which point every fly in the entire state of Iowa descended upon our car! (laughter)

After the storm passed and we found a repair shop, I asked the guy if he could get me a new windshield. And he said it would take two or three days to get one from Chicago and I said, "Well,

we don't have time." So, for about three hundred miles, I drove looking out that little space and Donna kind of had her head out the window, and we drove straight to a body shop—a huge body shop in the Twin Cities—to get an estimate. I said, "Hey, can you come out and look at this car?" And this guy came out and he said, "I've got to get the guys." A hundred guys come out of the body shop, gathered around my car, just shaking their heads and laughing hysterically. They'd never seen anything like it. They said, "It looks like where you pay at the county fair to take a sledge hammer and beat a car." (laughter) I mean we had dents on the underside of the car where hail stones hit the pavement and bounced up and dented the car! You know, there was a couple of moments there where we thought, "Maybe this wasn't such a good idea, us getting married. Maybe God is trying to tell us something!

But we've all had experiences, haven't we, where circumstances have not measured up to our expectations? But those aren't the hard ones. The hard ones are when we have expectations of people and those expectations are unmet—when we expect things of a spouse, of a parent, of a child, of a boss, of a friend and, what we expect them to be or to do doesn't happen. It is deeply disappointing. There are a lot of people who are deeply bitter and disappointed in life because people they trusted, people they thought they knew, have not lived up to their expectations. The deepest disappointments and bitterness in life come when the people we trust the most don't measure up to our expectations.

Do we ever find ourselves disappointed with God? Let's be honest this morning. Are there times when we have an expectation of who Jesus should be for us, and to us, and with us, and our experience doesn't seem to align with what we expected of Him? I know a lot of people who are angry and bitter with God because of some experience in life where their expectation of God wasn't fulfilled. Sometimes we even put a person's name on it, but deep down where we are really upset, what really disappoints us, is that God hasn't come through in the way we wanted Him to come through. What if I were to tell you this morning that the man that Jesus said was the greatest man ever born to a woman—ever born—also experienced such deep disappointment and disillusionment with Jesus, that he almost lost his faith.

Well let's look at that story this morning and see what we can learn from it for ourselves and what we can learn about Jesus. If you have a Bible, and I hope that you do come each week to study and learn God's word; if you have a Bible, turn to Matthew, Chapter 11. This is the story of the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist. We begin in verse 2 of chapter 11. This account begins there:

> **Now when John** (John the Baptist)**, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent *word* by his disciples, and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?"** (*NASB, Matthew 11:2-3)

Now on the surface of that, that seems like a normal question until we realize where this is taking place. John sends two of his disciples *from prison*, having heard of what Jesus was doing, to ask the question, "*Are You the One that we should be looking for?"* But this is the same guy who only months before—months before!—was declaring very boldly and clearly that Jesus was exactly the One that we were looking for. What happened? Turn over to John, Chapter 1, for just a minute because we need to see how clearly, how definitively, how boldly that John claimed that Jesus exactly was the Promised One, the coming King, the Savior, the Messiah. Read in John, Chapter 1, beginning in verse 29:

(This is John at the baptism of Jesus and every one of the Gospel writers records words very similar to this):

> **The next day John saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him.** (on Jesus) **I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."**
>
> (*NASB John 1:29-34)

Now how do you measure that? That happened just months ago! Back to chapter 11, where he says, **When you heard the works of Jesus, he sent his disciples, and said, "Are you the Expected One or shall we look for someone else?"** The key to understanding that is in the very first phrase of the verse there, verse 2: **When he heard of the works of Christ**... You see John had a vision and an expectation of what Jesus was going to do when He came. John had read all the prophets. John had read through Isaiah and Jeremiah. He had immersed himself in what the Promised One would be all about and, in John's mind, in John's vision, taken from Isaiah—in fact turn back to Matthew, Chapter 3, for just a minute and look at a couple of verses in chapter 3. This is John's vision as he is preaching of what Jesus is going to do, of what the Messiah is going to do when He comes. Verse 2 of Matthew 3: This is part of a message that Matthew records that John is giving:

> **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (**Verse 7): **But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."** (*NASB Matt. 3:2, 7-12)

You see John has envisioned—John's expectation is—that when Jesus comes, He's going to make everything right. He's going to come with justice. He's going to come with judgment. He's going to set all the wrongs in the world right and he's going to establish His kingdom. (I think he's thinking more of an earthly kingdom.) I think Jesus is going to rule; He's going to reign and He's going to reign and rule from Jerusalem. It's going to be the nation that he's wanted to see, that all of Israel was longing for, and Jesus is going to come and He's going to wipe out all of the evil, nasty people who are opposed to the kingdom. He's going to establish Himself with righteousness and justice. And all of a sudden John's in prison for confronting sin and, instead of Jesus coming to John, instead of Jesus rescuing John, Jesus goes off to Galilee. And what's Jesus doing? What does John see or hear about what Jesus is doing? Jesus is healing people by the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is turning loaves and fish into food for five thousand. Jesus is up making wine. And John is like, "I thought You were going to be something completely different—a completely different vision for

what You were going to do when You came." And so much was his expectation unmet—disappointed—that he actually sends his messengers to say, "*Are You really the One? Are You really the One, or should we look for someone else?"*

I think John is typical of many of us—that we have very clear expectations about who Jesus should be, what He's going to do—and oftentimes we find ourselves, rather unwittingly, having bought into only a partial picture of who Jesus is. And then we find ourselves really, really disappointed because He isn't coming through in the way we expect. What's Jesus response? Verse 4:

> **Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: *the* BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT 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. And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."**
> (Matthew 11:4-6)

Now this is very, very fascinating, because do you know what Jesus actually does here? Jesus goes back to the very prophets that John the Baptist has been quoting and He reads to John, "Here's the next verse, John." Actually this is taken out of Isaiah 35. John's message kind of stopped with verse 4 of Isaiah 35. Isaiah 35, verse 4 says:

> **"Behold, your God will come *with* vengeance; the recompense of God will come, but He will save you."** (*NASB Isaiah 35:4b)

Jesus goes on and says, "John, you didn't finish the whole text." Verses 5 and 6 say:

> **"The eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf will be unstopped, the lame will leap and the mute will begin to shout for joy."**

You see, John had only read parts of the Scripture and he had embraced that part, but Jesus just goes back and says, "John, you've got to read the whole thing; you've got to get the whole story. You've got to get the whole picture of who I am. I'm so much more than what you thought I was going to be." It's not that what John believed was wrong; it's just that he didn't have the whole picture.

You know what Jesus really does here is He comes and He creates disillusionment. Now we often think of disillusionment as a negative thing, but do you realized that disillusionment is a really good thing? You see, if we're living under an illusion—a false idea, something that isn't true—then what's the important thing that needs to happen? That illusion has to be destroyed. We need to become disillusioned so we can see truth and see things as they really are. That's what Jesus does for John. "John, you don't have the whole picture; you only have part of the picture. I am both justice and mercy. John, if you just watch, if you just look and see, if you don't take offense at Me, if you don't turn away because I'm not quite who you thought I was going to be, you will see everything that's written about Me come to fulfillment. Don't stumble over Me. Don't miss who I am in all of the fullness."

Now this question was asked in front of the crowd and Jesus answered in front of the crowd who was gathered around Him. There's always a crowd around Jesus, and Jesus was not upset. Jesus did not put John down for having these questions. In fact Jesus goes on here to make a great tribute to John the Baptist. Verse 7:

As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces! But why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.' Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (*NASB Matt. 11:7-15)

Jesus wants to make it very clear that John is not fickle; John has not gone soft; John has not had some moral failure. These questions came out of his understanding of who the Messiah was going to be. He just didn't have the full picture. And Jesus honors John as someone who was great—not only a great prophet, not only somebody who was very strong, not only somebody who was very bold—but John was also a part of the whole redemptive story. In fact John didn't just tell about it coming, John was part of the fulfillment of the Messianic promise because John, too, had been prophesied about. John was part of the Messiah coming. Jesus and John were hand in hand in bringing to bear this new kingdom message and the introduction of Jesus as King. And Jesus pays tribute to him by saying, "**There's never been a man born who is greater than John the Baptist**." What a great tribute!

But it's very interesting, that last phrase in that same verse, in verse 11, he says, "*Even though John is the greatest man ever born to a woman, the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."* You see Jesus is making it very clear even here, that this is not a performance-based kingdom. This is a kingdom of grace, and everyone who believes, everyone who enters in, everyone who trusts the King and enters into the kingdom is as great as John the Baptist. What a great kingdom it is! Not based on performance, not based on what one does, but based on who Jesus is.

Verse 12 is such an interesting verse because there's a number of different ways that word *violent* here can be interpreted...as *forcefully*. Some commentators say the kingdom of God has been advancing forcefully, but forceful men are trying to seize it. So you get this sense of battle. Some have it both in the negative like the NASB is, in that there is this battle. There are forceful people who are trying to force their way into the kingdom, who are trying to shape the kingdom in the way that they want it to be shaped. That too makes sense. That word could also be translated *hastily*, or *eagerly*—that the kingdom is taken eagerly; the people eagerly want to go out and grab a hold of it, but they haven't really thought about it. They haven't really examined what it takes to be a part of the kingdom. And that also was true. People went out, flocked out, to see John. They flocked by the crowds to see Jesus. They wanted to see the show. They eagerly embraced the kingdom on one level, but they really didn't believe.

All of those are possible interpretations that make sense in light of this story. I don't think Jesus intended all of those to be what He meant, but we really don't have a good picture of which one of those it is. But the fact remains that John was facing that opposition. John had done his part; Jesus is paying tribute to John. John had been faithful to proclaim the message and to share that the kingdom was coming and John was facing some of that persecution, some of that opposition that would come with the kingdom of God. There is a foreshadowing there.

And then He ends that by saying, "*If you have ears to hear, listen*." That's really the point Jesus is making! Jesus is saying that if you will watch and listen, you will see that everything that is in the Old Testament, both the Law and the Prophets, everything that John the Baptist is saying and everything that I will do, will all come together in absolutely perfect harmony and it will all make sense in the end. If you will listen to it all, it all speaks in unity as to who I am, what My mission is and what the kingdom of God is all about. Are you listening...are you listening? That's what Jesus was saying to the crowd. And then He ends this section with an indictment of those who are gathered right there. Verse 16:

> **"But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other *children*, and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating or drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man, a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."**
>
> (Vs. 16-19)

Jesus uses the children playing a game in the market place to illustrate the generation that He was speaking to. He says it's like children in a game and somebody has a musical instrument and when you start to play the instrument, if it's a happy tune, everybody dances joyfully. And then they will change the tune and say, "Let's play funeral," and they play a sad song and everybody mourns, and He was saying, "There's these games we play, but this generation," He says, "are like children who are demanding that they want to hear what they want to hear. They don't want to play the game. They don't want to believe the message. They didn't like John; they rejected John, 'John was way too serious; John has a demon; he's scary. Jesus, we don't like what he has to say. He's too joyful, too celebratory. He's doing all these things and we reject Jesus.' " You see what the people of that generation wanted was, they wanted a kingdom to their own liking. They wanted to make their own kingdom, their own king. They wanted a gospel that suited them. They didn't want to listen and embrace Jesus, the message of Jesus, the person of Jesus, or the message of John.

Jesus says, "*In the end, wisdom will be vindicated by her deeds*." In other words, you can have your own gospel and your own kingdom but, in the end it will become quite evident whether that's true, whether or not that's a true kingdom, a true king, a true gospel.

Are we much different than that generation? I mean, isn't there a part of us that just wants to shape Jesus to be who we want Him to be? Of all cultures, I think ours is most susceptible to this, because we really see ourselves front and center. And so we have all kinds of visions of who we want Jesus to be. We want Jesus to be all merciful—that He would just accept everyone no matter what they're doing or who they are, no matter what they believe—that Jesus is just this big merciful, open-arms person. There's no judgment, no justice. Some people want Jesus to be like Santa Claus. They just want Him to give them what they want, and there are a lot of preachers out there who tell you that's what Jesus will do for you. I mean, "Just ask Him and he will give you whatever you want." "Give me this, and I want that. Bless me, Lord, I pray. Make me wealthy; keep me healthy." Fill in what I miss on my never-ending shopping list. And all we want is for Jesus to perform for us, to dance for us, to give us the things that we need. A lot of people have that vision for Jesus in their own life. They oftentimes find themselves very disappointed.

Some people have a vision for Jesus being all justice. Their vision maybe was more of John's—like wipe out all the bad people, I mean, "Come on, Jesus, just wipe them out." You know you see in every disease and catastrophe—well, God, just wipe it out—some people that were probably

offensive to Him and they really want God just to be all justice for everybody else at least—maybe mercy for me.

You see we have a tendency to want to shape Jesus, to kind of pick and choose from the Scriptures the parts and pieces that we want Jesus to be for us, instead of embracing Him as He has revealed Himself to be. Now sometimes we do that rather unwittingly. Perhaps you have a vision of Jesus that's been handed down to you. You were taught wrongly about who Jesus was and so your image, your idea of Jesus, is not accurate; it's not clear. We need to go and find the real Jesus. We need to read the Scriptures. We need to understand who He claimed to be, who He said He was in all of His fullness. But some of us very willingly try to craft a Jesus to our own liking, try to craft a gospel to our own liking—one that doesn't interfere with our plans, with our ideas, with our agenda. And when our experience doesn't line up with that Jesus that we've crafted, we become disillusioned, disappointed.

Here are a couple of things to think about as we conclude today. First of all: Jesus was not offended by John's questions. I don't think Jesus is offended when we have questions. When those questions force us, when our faith is tested, and we don't know for sure what's really real and true and we go and we ask the question, "Jesus, are you really who I thought You were?" those questions don't offend God. But the question is: Where do I go with my questions? Do I go to the Scriptures? Do I go back to the source? Do I go back to say, "Show me who You really are so I can align my expectations with who You have shown Yourself to be." It's where we go with our questions that make all the difference.

And then I think that we have a challenge that, when we read the Scriptures, when we're trying to understand what God's promises are for us and what Jesus is saying He will be and do for us, we have a tendency to be very selective listeners. If you have children, you know what I'm talking about—selective listening. Right? You kind of hear what you want to hear, and we have a tendency to hear what we want to hear, to kind of open up the Bible and sort of be looking for what we want God to be saying to us. We want Jesus to be a certain thing and we want God to affirm our plans, and so we're looking, and we can always find a verse; we can always find a verse that will tell us what we want to hear. But is it really in its context? Is it really true; are we really reading the whole story; are we immersing ourselves in truth? Are we really trying to know Jesus intimately in every facet, in all that He is, and then embrace the Jesus as He reveals Himself?

We need to be careful that we don't fall into that—just hearing what we want to hear. There's a danger even just coming to church every week, just to sort of hear the show, to see the show, to have our ears tickled, to kind of have a great message, some great worship, and go home and we have our little critique: How was it? Do you think that was a "10" or was it an "8"? And somehow we aren't really listening, listening for God to speak, aligning our expectations with who He has revealed Himself to be.

There's one other thing we need to think about and I've thought about this a lot, because I hear a lot of people very definitively say, "God told me to do this," or, "God called me to do that," and then a lot of times those plans don't quite work out; things don't kind of happen the way they are hoped, and what I have really struggled with through the years is to say, "You know, there's a lot more flesh in me than I want to admit sometimes." That is that I can want something so badly that I can sort of hear God say it and I need to be humble and honest enough to say that even when I'm absolutely convinced that I have heard and understood who Jesus is, what He wants me to do, what His call in my life is, I have to be humble and honest enough to say, "You know what, to the best of my ability I've heard it, but I might just be wrong." So we are humble before God. We are humble

before His Word, like John was, like John honestly coming to Jesus to say, "Jesus, tell me, have I expected the wrong thing; have I thought of you in the wrong way?" And Jesus says, "Read the rest of the text; get the big picture; see who I am; embrace Me as I am.

Now this is a very disturbing story on one level because there is no good earthly resolution to the story of John the Baptist. You read in Matthew 14, just a couple of chapters later, that John was actually beheaded and do you know, Jesus never went to visit John in prison? Jesus didn't rescue John. In fact when Jesus heard that John went to prison, He went to Galilee. He went the opposite direction. Jesus didn't raise John the Baptist from the dead. There was no good earthly resolution. But I can tell you this: that the moment that executioner's knife fell across his neck, John entered into *glory*. He saw the picture perfectly. And what did John see in that moment when he entered into the kingdom that he couldn't see here on earth? He saw that Jesus' justice and mercy perfectly came together in His incarnation, because Jesus didn't come as the judge to judge the unrighteousness of the world like John was expecting. Jesus came to be judged on behalf of a guilty world and God's justice was satisfied and the victory was won! And mercy and justice came together absolutely perfectly in the life of Jesus. John just couldn't see it from his perspective. Just like it's hard for us to sometimes see Jesus from our perspective. But God has given us His truth. It needs to guide our understanding; it needs to help us set our expectations. We need Him to show us the real Jesus, the One who is *Simply Jesus,* who is everything we could want or imagine...and so much more—but He's not always exactly what we would like Him to be.

> *Our Father, I pray that You would align our expectations of You with who You really are. God, forgive us for wanting to craft You in our own image, for wanting You to be what we want You to be instead of just embracing You for who You are. Lord, we acknowledge this morning we will never be disappointed if we just embrace You for who You are. If we see the big picture, if we continue to follow hard after You, we will understand enough to know that it's always the best to embrace You. So, God, lead us toward Yourself. Help us to lay aside all of those false ideas about who You are and embrace You. In Jesus' Name. Amen*

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