

Part 62: Expectations of the Cross

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One of my favorite commercials is one that features a late-middle-aged, balding white man named Michael Jordan. The commercial just portrays the look of disappointment waiters, receptionists, valet drivers and pizza delivery men had when they thought Michael Jordan was coming, but it turned out to just be...Michael Jordan.

Today's passage is one I have longed to preach with you all because it's been one of the most profoundly helpful passages in my own life. It's a passage where Jesus leans into our false expectations, and corrects them with the weight of the cross.

My guess is most of us have a similar experience as those people in the commercial. We hope and expect one thing, and are pretty deflated when we find out that our hope was crushed. Maybe, it was a first date, or a job interview. But I would imagine that there are some in here today who have had a similar experience with Jesus. You've showed up to church, you've gone to prayer, hoping to find everything you've hoped for—only to be met with disappointment. "I thought life would be easier?" "I thought I'd be tempted less?" "I thought I'd get the family I always wanted?" "I thought the depression would go away?" "I thought I got the kingdom?"

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once put it this way, "Hope, in reality, is the worst of all evils because it prolongs the torments of man."

It's the question and problem of hope that Jesus is going to address today. What should we expect about Jesus and his kingdom? He's going to help us not by conforming himself to our hopes, but by recalibrating and conforming our hopes to him. What's the expectation Jesus wants us to have in life? He tells us in **verse 33**: "Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it."

The only way we can make sense of that phrase, the only way we can make sense of our lives, is by making sense of the man who said it. Our main point this morning is this: **The cross of Jesus sets the expectation for the Christian life.** We are going to see this in four ways today. First we will examine **The Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ**, and then we will see how the cross changes our expectations in three ways. First we will see **The Cross Protects us from False Hope**, then how **The Cross Warns us of Future Judgement**, and finally how **The Cross Frees us to Lose our Lives.**

Our text today opens (**vs. 20**) with Jesus being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God will come. The Pharisees couldn't make sense of Jesus in light of what they thought about the kingdom of God. Jesus addresses this problem in our first point this morning: **The Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ.**

For the Jews, the idea of the Kingdom of God was the answer to all their sorrows. They were God's chosen people, God had promised to make them into a powerful nation that ruled over the whole world. But for the last seven hundred years the nation of Israel had fallen into greater and greater disrepair.

Half of the kingdom fell in 720 to the Assyrians, and the other half was carried into captivity by Babylon in 596 B.C. For the remaining centuries, small Jewish insurrections tried to liberate themselves but for the most part they ended in bloody massacres. Though now back in the Promised Land, the Jews are not owners of their kingdom, they are ruled by Rome, under Roman authority and law.

So when Jesus claims to be the Jewish messiah who will to establish again the Kingdom of God, the hope-meter spiked real high. But so far, Jesus has been pretty disappointing in this regard. He's spent most of his time amassing sick people instead of warriors, he's leading tax collectors and sinners and not soldiers, and he's spent most of his time challenging religious Jews and not Roman Gentiles.

This is what leads to the frustrated question of the Pharisees here in verse 20: they say to Jesus, "You haven't changed any of our problems. Tell us when you're going to start solving things for real, and then maybe we'll follow you." This challenge is not exclusive to first century Pharisees, and Jesus wants to help us assess and correct our own ideas of the Christian hope as well.

The Pharisees ask a question of *when*, but Jesus answers in verse **20-21** with the answer of *how*: "'The Kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.'"

Jesus' answer levies two challenges to the heart of the Pharisees. First he says, when it comes you won't be able to observe it. And second, he tells them why, because it's already in their midst and they can't see it.

What does Jesus mean by this? Well look at what he says next about our longing for hope: **Luke 17:22-23**.

Do you see what Jesus did here? He actually redefined the object of hope. Jesus turns to his disciples and begins to teach them about their own longing for hope. And what will be their consolation in those difficult days? The days of the Son of Man. The kingdom the Pharisees miss in their midst is the Son of Man who Christians long for.

Jesus is tying the kingdom of God to the days of the Son of Man, who is Christ himself. He is the kingdom in their midst, he is what the Pharisees are blinded to. If we want hope in the hardship of this life, we must learn to see the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, the Son of Man.

There is no kingdom of God, there is no kingdom of peace, there is no Christianity or Christian hope apart from Jesus Christ. Yet it is so easy for us to dream our dreams, and hope our hopes, apart from our nearness to Jesus Christ. But our hope amidst hardship and disappointment is nothing but Jesus himself.

A pastor in Philadelphia named Donald Grey Barnhouse showed us the danger of our expectations regarding the kingdom of God by giving an example of what things would look like if Satan overtook a whole city. He said something like this: "All the bars would be closed, all pornography and prostitution banished, the streets would be clean and filled with happy and kind people, children would say, 'Yes, sir' and 'No, ma'am,' smiles would be sweet, churches would be full, and Christ would not be preached."

In other words it would be Satan's desire to grant you a kingdom where everything and all your dreams and securities were answered, as long as there was no Jesus. Be careful for what you are hoping for.

Jesus continues to readjust our hope in **verses 24-25**, "For as lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation."

So here we are introduced to a tension that sets up the rest of Jesus teaching and the tension is this. The coming of the kingdom of God, the day when all our hopes are finally answered, is both obvious and obscure.

It's obvious because when it happens, you'll know. I remember growing up watching firework shows I'd always lean over and ask my dad, "Is this the grand finale!" And he would often say to me, "You'll know when it's the grand finale." He was right, despite how many simultaneous fireworks went off during the course of the show, the ending was always self-evident. Like lightening across the sky, the whole horizon was lit up.

The prophet Daniel prophetically speaks of this day in **Daniel 7:13-14** when he says, "there came one like a son of man" appeared, "and to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples and nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and his kingdom will not be destroyed."

When Jesus returns to establish the kingdom, you won't miss it. It will be obvious to the whole world. But that's then. Now, now this hope is obscured. And what is it obscured by? Suffering. The Kingdom will not be destroyed, but at least at first, the king will be.

The contrast between the Daniel 7 unbreakable kingdom of the Son of Man and Jesus' suffering, rejected son of man would have been stark, scandalous and entirely outrageous. But here, Jesus gives us the decoder glasses for all of human history, the lens that brings order out of disorder. What is that lens? The cross.

We can't understand Jesus apart from the cross. We can't understand the Son of Man, the course of the world, the hope of the Christian or the expectation of the Christian life without the cross. The cross captures the kingdom that cannot be observed by the eyes of the flesh. The cross is wrapped in weakness, but robed in power, the cross wreaks of death but gushes life, the cross pulls down the darkness, but breaks open the light.

If our hope is only Jesus, if the kingdom of God is Jesus Christ, then our expectations in this life will look like Jesus. And what did Jesus' life look like on earth? It looked like the power of the cross.

Here we see the reorienting effect of the cross. First, **The Cross Protects us From False Hope.**

You'll notice up through verse 25 Jesus has twice warned us that when most people say, "Look, here it is! There, there is salvation!" that it's probably not true. In fact Jesus says to us, in our own day as we look forward to Jesus return to not follow those who say, "Look, there" or "Look, here is the kingdom of God."

Now why is that? Because the kingdom obvious to our eyes is not the kingdom. Martin Luther says all of us fall into one of two categories: a theologian of glory or a theologian of the cross.

This distinction between the theologian of glory and the theologian of the cross was central in Luther's day, and it's central in Jesus' teaching here as well. Luther says it this way: "[**The theologian of glory**] **does not deserve to be called a theologian who claims to see into the invisible things of God by seeing through earthly things...but the [theologian of the cross]...comprehends what is visible of God through suffering and the cross.**"

In other words some of us can only see the invisible "glory of God" in the things that are "glorious" in the world. Where is the good life? Well where in the world is power? There, is the kingdom of God. Where in the world is comfort? There is the kingdom of God. Where in the world is peace? There is the kingdom of God. Which means that when we encounter weakness, we think God isn't at work, when we encounter difficulties we think God to be displeased with us, when we labor in what lacks glory, we think God to be lackluster. We only perceive the invisible things of God through the visible things of the world.

But this misses the cross, which is the power of God.

The prophet Isaiah warns of this theology of worldly glory when he says this in **Isaiah 31:1**: "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord!"

Brothers and sisters may I be frank with you all. Our world is saying, "Look, here it is." Our politicians are saying, "Look, here it is." Our church leaders are saying, "Look, here it is." But if what they are pointing to is not the ignoble, offensive, weakness of the cross, if what they are pointing to is the power to make peace by might, to console fears by the counsel of the many, to call us away from weakness and reliance into confidence and hope in horses then call it what James does in James 4:15: demonic.

Christ is not tied to the power of the church. The church is tied to the power of Christ. A power which now is despised and rejected by men. (**2 Cor. 4:7-12**), "**But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies, For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.**"

If the weakness of Jesus is offensive to you, then his power is not for you.

If we cannot see the power of the cross in weakness, then we will sinfully seek to find power in things that will be shown as powerless. This is what we see next, **The Cross Warns us of Future Judgement.**

When Jesus returns, it will not only be spectacular, but it will suddenly sweep away all of our false glories. Here Jesus shares with us two case studies: **Luke 17:26-30**. "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot--they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, first and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all--so will it be with the Son of Man is revealed."

If you're unfamiliar with the story of the Bible, both Noah and Lot were figures in Israel's history who symbolized God's judgement on sinners and God's salvation of his people.

But the focus of Jesus' message here is on those who did not seek salvation. It's on those who did not care about the coming judgement. Actually, in the instance of Lot the angel told Lot that if there was anyone else in the city who had concern for, that he should go warn them to flee with him.

In **Genesis 19:14** we read "Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law who were to marry his daughters, 'Up! Get out of this place, for the Lord is about to destroy the city.' But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting."

He warned them, but they laughed at him. While Noah built the boat you can imagine he looked like an absolute fool. We start asking questions when our neighbors build a shed, and here Noah built an ark. But sure enough, that judgement came. The flood rose, the fire fell, and those who were preoccupied with better things, observable things, glorious things, were destroyed.

So too, Jesus says, will it be when the Son of Man is revealed. Judgement against sin will come, and there will be those who refuse to do anything to prepare for it.

I'd like to point out two features of this day of judgement that Jesus speaks of.

First, Jesus speaks of it both as a singular "day of the Son of man" (vs. 24, 30, 31) but he also speaks of it as a plural "days of the Son of man" (vs. 22, 26).

What do we make of this? Well at some point, the day of the Lord will come. The sky will reveal the divine swell that stands behind it, and just as we confess in the Apostles' Creed, Christ will return "to judge the living and the dead."

But also, it means that while we wait that day, we are in these days. Peter affirms this when he quotes Joel 2 saying that we are in "these last days." Just as there were people who lived between Noah and the flood, Lot and the fire, we live between Christ's first coming and second coming.

And here's the problem. We must eat and drink and relate to others till he comes back. But we do so carefully.

Why? Because secondly, Jesus speaks of this judgement as both a "day" in verse 31 and a night in verse "34." It is the day when the light of all our false hopes are turned off, and the light of Christ is turned on.

That's why Jesus says this in verse **31**, "On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back."

We must remember that as we turn to eating, drinking, marrying, and living, we live in light of this day. When Jesus comes back, we don't go back for our valuables, we don't try to grab our trinkets, we run to Jesus. We gladly cast aside the fleeting joys of this world for the surpassing joy of being united with Jesus.

This is where Jesus presses his primary point home for us today in **Luke 17:32-33**, "Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it."

This is our final point this morning: **The Cross Frees us to Lose Our Lives.**

"Remember Lot's wife," that's the allusion Jesus makes here. In Genesis 19 we read what happens with Lot's wife. As Lot and his family are delivered from Sodom they are warned to flee quickly and to not look back.

But in **verse 26** we read, "But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt."

Now what is going on here? Here's a great example of how scripture helps us understand scripture. In verse 33 Jesus tells us why she perished. She didn't perish because her neck turned, she perished because her heart did. It was her desire, not her direction that sealed her fate. Charles Spurgeon calls this, her last "love-look." When hope was on the line she didn't want God's mercy, she wanted the world's glory.

That's why Jesus makes this stunning proclamation in vs. 33, "Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it." The way of the cross, hope in the coming Son of Man looks a lot like losing your life by worldly standards. Paul says in 1 Corinthians (1:23) that the gospel is foolishness to the world.

It's foolishness because unless we see that our greatest problem is sin, and our greatest hope is Jesus who takes away our sin on the cross, then a call to follow Jesus is a call to come and die. This should not only prepare our own hearts for the need of preaching the gospel to ourselves, but it should shape how we help others follow Jesus.

Jesus seemed to emphasize two idols in the people who rejected the offer of salvation: marriage and labor. Sex and career. The University of Montana is just about to start, and there are no greater idols on campus than these two. When we begin to share the gospel and care for those students and those leaders, we must realize that what they are being called to turn from seems like the dumbest thing they could ever do.

But it's our job to tell them that this is the way of the cross. Now it looks dumb, now it might look like death, but when the lights go out, our hope shines. The gods of sex and money die in the grave, but our God came out of the grave.

We will live alongside others, we will live with others, we will at times eat, get paid, and get married like others. But we must not forget Lot's wife. We must not forget that our hope is not in what others hope in.

That's why Jesus gives this kind of eerie parable at the end when he says (**Luke 17:34-37**): "I tell you in that night, there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left. And they said to him, 'Where Lord?' He said to them, 'Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.'"

What's Jesus point here? His point is that two people may live life in this world in seemingly similar ways. Living in the same family, working at the same job, but when Jesus comes back the difference of

hope is drastically different. Remember Lot's wife. This world is divided by hope. It's divided by what we think saves us.

It's divided by our expectations. Remember our good 'ol friend Nietzsche: "Hope in reality is the worst of all evils, because it prolongs the torments of man." We will all be judged by our hope. The Christian hope in this life, is the scandal of the cross. It looks like torment, but it's what saves. It's the only thing that saves. Romans 5:5 says of the Christian, "our hope does not put us to shame."

One day, Jesus will come back for us. But right now, in the midst of all that is hard and difficult, in the midst of sneers and jeers, Jesus walks with us. Remember Paul's words in **2 Corinthians 12:9-10**.

The Pharisees, and the theologians of glory see the world in black and white. If it's good it's good. If it's bad it's bad. But the cross shows the world in living color. It refuses to call the evil refuge of sin good, and it refuses to call the good sovereignty of God bad. The kingdom of God is in power, but it's also in weakness. The grace of God is in comfort, but it's also in the crucible. Why? So that we might rest in him, the true arc which really saves from the flood of judgement, the firstborn who came from heaven not to consume us, but to woo us, to reward us, and to walk in it with us through the Spirit.

In such a crazy world, with a seemingly upside down hope, how can we make sense of it?

Here's where I have one point of application for you today: Learn to love the church.

This might seem really weird for us, but in a world which cannot see the kingdom, the church is a place where we have learned what to look for. The church isn't the kingdom, not at all, but the local church is where we help others live, love, and labor with the corrective lens of the cross.

While the world can't see the color of the cross, your brothers and sisters in Christ can. In the local church we together live out the ideals of the kingdom, remind each other of the hope of the kingdom, participate in the signs of the kingdom, submit ourselves to the word of the kingdom, and worship the king of the kingdom.

This room, our members, should be an embassy of this kind of hope. It's a hope which is still carried by sinners, still pinched by pain and smitten by suffering, but it's a hope that holds on together. It's a hope, it's a community that looks like the cross. And in this cross—is our hope, our confidence, and our salvation.