

# Great expectations

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Good morning. As Pastor Tim mentioned, my name is Trenton, and I've been here for 2 years with my wife Olivia and my 2 kids: Owen and Jane. While we love Madrid, our story of how we got here was an amazing journey that took place over the last 2 years we lived in the United States. We lived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and we had seen God moving. We could feel God was leading us out of Pittsburgh. We didn't know where. We didn't know how. There were conversations through work and for those last 2 years we just knew God was doing something.

So, one particular afternoon, Olivia and I were sitting in our living room and, no kidding, I receive an email from the realtor who sold us the house that we've been living in for the previous 5 years. Out of the blue, he emails us and asks if we ever considered selling our house, because if so, now is the time to do it. If I'm honest, Olivia and I were a bit taken by surprise, but we talked about it, sought some council from some friends of ours and prayed. Finally, after praying and doing our own research, along with other things we knew God was doing, we decided: "Yes, we think this is what God wants us to do. God wants us to sell our house. Keep in mind, at this point, there's no job prospect or anything remotely close to something concrete about what is going to happen after we sell our house. Yet we still decided to do it.

After that, over the next month or so, we did the few things necessary to prepare the house to sell, and by June 2018, we were ready to list the house. We had planned it perfectly, because we were getting ready to leave for the next month for mission trips, camps, and just time with family. Therefore, the house was going to be empty for the entire first month it was on the market. Why was that important? Well, in our research, what we had learned was that our house would most likely sell within the first 2 months, based on its price range and location. Furthermore, that was almost guaranteed to us by our realtor as well.

So, we went away, and our expectation was that, by the time we return, many people will have seen our home, and we will have a couple offers on our house. However, unfortunately, when we returned home, nobody had looked at the house. Nobody had even been to the house. As you can imagine, we were a little bit shocked and confused, but based on what we knew, we still had another month to sell our

house. Until, month two came and, again, no one came, and nothing happened with our house. Now we were two months in, with a house that was supposed to have sold, confused yet again.

Next, the realtor calls at the beginning of month three, also confused and shocked. He suggests that perhaps a small price adjustment down into the next price bracket will spark more interest. So, we do what he says. We drop the price to a lower price bracket and month three comes, and if I remember correctly, we had maybe one person visit the house. Again, you can imagine our confusion, our frustration. Why is nobody interested in our home? God, what are you doing? Month four comes. Again, only one or two people come to view the house, but no offers. By this point, you can imagine where Olivia and I are. Did we miss something? Was this what we really were supposed to do? God, why? God, what are you doing? We were frustrated, confused, disappointed, tired.

Why am I telling you a story about confusion, frustration and disappointment today, on Palm Sunday? This is the Sunday where you hear the story of Jesus triumphantly entering Jerusalem. He is on the back of a donkey. People are shouting “Hosanna!” which means save us. Others are shouting “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” There is a massive celebration going on, yet I’m telling you a story about the opposite of celebration. Why? This morning, I want to challenge you to look at that triumphant entry from a different perspective.

If you will, close your eyes for a moment. Imagine you’re one of the apostles. You’ve been following Jesus for the last 3 years. You’ve seen him do many miraculous things. You’ve heard his teachings. You were there when he turned water into wine. You were there when we walked on water, and if you were Peter, you also walked on water. You were there when he raised Lazarus from the dead. Now, imagine seeing this massive celebration as you’re entering into Jerusalem. You know what the prophecy says. You are Jewish. So, you would have grown up studying the Torah and the prophets. You would have been familiar with the prophecies like what we read in Zechariah earlier this morning.

The thought you have in your mind as you are watching Jesus ride in is probably one of two thoughts. First, Jesus is going into Jerusalem to restore the physical nation of Israel. Or perhaps, the other thought, now is the time where Jesus will overthrow the Romans. During this historical period, that’s what many people thought the Messiah was going to do. However, what do we know today that will happen to Jesus in the coming days? Jesus is about to be arrested, flogged, crucified and killed. Now, remember what the apostles are going to do when this happens. Many of the apostles are going to scatter and go into hiding. They are going to be afraid, doubtful and disappointed. Peter's going to deny Christ three times.

How do you go from this point of triumphant entry to a point where you’re afraid, confused, and you’re denying that you know Jesus? If we’re honest, I think many of us in our lives experience something similar to the apostles. Something similar to what I experienced when trying to sell my home. Many of us have received promises or callings in our lives, but somewhere along the way our expectations of what God is going to do and what God does begin to look very different. They don't line up, and when that happens it leads us to this place of confusion, doubt, frustration and disappointment. So, how does that happen? And, when we get there, how do we respond?

That's what I want to talk to you about this morning. Now, to start, how do we get to this point? How do we get to where our expectations and God's actions diverge? I think if we look at this example of the apostles, we can learn something from them. Because, in this moment of probably thinking Jesus was going to restore Israel and take out the Romans, the apostles missed something that was very important. Look with me, if you will, in Mark 8:31:

***"And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again."***

Now look in Mark 9:31:

***"...for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.'"***

And again, look in Mark 10:33:

***"See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."***

Not once, not twice, but three separate times, Jesus told the apostles what was going to happen. So how did they miss this? We know at least Peter recognized Jesus as the Son of Man, because he declares it to Jesus earlier in the Gospels. So, what happened? Here's what I think. I think that the apostles chose to hear only the parts of the promise that they wanted to hear. They wanted to hear the prophecy about the Messiah as a warrior. They wanted to hear the prophecy about the restoration of Israel. Because those all fit with their desire of who they wanted the Messiah to be and what they wanted him to do. They wanted the restoration of the physical nation of Israel and the elimination of the Romans. But to accept that the Messiah was going to die? That doesn't fit, and so I believe when they heard this, they rejected the possibility because it didn't align with their desires.

How many of us do that as well? Some of us, God has given us promises, and the reality is that with those promises come things that sometimes we don't always like. Maybe He promised you that someday you will get married, but first you must leave the relationship you're in. Maybe it's a promise that God is going to lead you into new opportunities in your career, but first you must quit the job you're currently in. Maybe God promised to meet a financial need, but first you need to give to someone else in need. Many of us, myself included, only want to accept the promises that align with our own desires or ignore the parts that require sacrifice. Then, instead of reflecting inward at our hearts and selfishness, we turn to question God.

In a similar way, perhaps others of us aren't ignoring God's promises. However, we take what God has originally promised and add to it. That's what happened to Olivia and me. I believe God called us to sell our house, but we added the "in 1-2 months" part, which only set us up for disappointment. And for you, it will be the same. We can't hold God to something he didn't commit to. So, in summary, how do

we get to this place of frustration or disappointment? I believe it happens when we look at God's promises through a lens of our own desires, instead of what God desires.

Regardless of how you get there, what do we do once we reach this point? How do we respond? To answer this, I want to take a quick look at the life of David, in the Old Testament. Specifically looking at portions of the book of 1 Samuel. David, I think, is a great example of someone who is given a promise from God and he also saw God do many things that pointed towards the fulfillment of that promise. Starting at age 15, he was anointed to be the next king of Israel by Samuel the prophet, and from that moment on, scripture tells us that the Lord was with David and he was blessed in all he did. Next, we read that David was invited into Saul's court, specifically to play music for Saul. Then, about the same time or shortly after, we read the passage many of us are familiar with. The battle of David and Goliath, and with it David receives a promise of Wealth, exemption from Taxes, and Saul's daughter's hand in marriage. Furthermore, because of his success, Saul continues to give David more and more battle missions, and due to his success, David becomes famous and the people begin to love him. Ultimately, Saul ends up giving David a high rank in the Military. So, to recap, David is anointed to be king, becomes a member of the Royal Court, becomes wealthy and loved by the people. He obtains a high rank within the military and eventually ends up married to Saul's daughter Michal. I don't know about you, but if I'm trying to become the next king of Israel, those are all the things on my to do list. David has everything going for him. God is moving in miraculous ways and surely God is going to make him king soon!

But this is where everything begins to go wrong. Saul notices what is happening with David and he starts to get jealous. Listen to what it says in 1 Samuel 18:6-8:

***"As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. And the women sang to one another as they celebrated, 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands.' And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, 'They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?'"***

Eventually, this continues until we get to chapter 19, where verse one reveals that Saul is now actively instructing his servants to kill David. If you're David, what does this mean for you? Well, as you expect as you continue reading, David finds himself on the run for his life. Imagine what that must have felt like. Everything is going his way and, suddenly, it is almost as if he's back to square one. Everything that God has been doing to set him up seems to have been undone. I can imagine maybe there's some confusion, frustration, disappointment. I mean, up to this point, David has been nothing but loyal to King Saul. Yet, here he is, on the run for his life.

So how does David respond? What are his thoughts while he's running for his life? 1 Samuel doesn't tell us. But the beautiful thing about the Bible and David is that we know David wrote a lot of the book of Psalms. In fact, some of those Psalms that David wrote are believed to have been written during this period. Perhaps if we look into the Psalms, we can find an answer to how David felt and how he

responded. This morning I specifically want to look at portions of two of his Psalms: Psalm 34 and Psalm 59. If you will, let's look first at Psalm 59, specifically verses 9 and 10:

***"O my Strength, I will watch for you, for you, O God, are my fortress. My God in his steadfast love will meet me; God will let me look in triumph on my enemies."***

Now look at Psalm 34:4-5:

***"I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant and their faces shall never be ashamed."***

After reading those verses, what's the take-away? David is in a situation where everything is against him. However, when you read these verses, that's not the impression you get. Sure, David, in other parts of these Psalms, acknowledges that things are not exactly going his way, but notice where his focus seems to be. Notice despite what is going on around him, David is still focused on God. David is still dependent on God. He still believes and trusts that God will be faithful. You see, David isn't letting his circumstances distract him from the faithfulness of God. Furthermore, I'd like to actually go back to Psalm 34 for a moment to further this point. Look with me at verses 1 to 3:

***"I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!"***

Again, notice the perspective of David. He is fully dependent and fully trusting God. I think this is where I have struggled many times. We trust God so long as things are going well, but as soon as things start to go the other way, we lose sight of God's faithfulness and get distracted by our circumstances. Remember in the Gospels, when Jesus walks on water. What does Peter do? He calls out for Jesus to let him walk out to him. Miraculously, Peter walks on water. But what happens when he gets distracted by the waves and the wind? He sinks. How many of us here today have become distracted by the waves and the wind of our lives? How many of us have lost sight of the faithfulness of God? So, first, we must stay focused on God and on his promise, instead of being distracted by our temporary circumstances.

So, what else? How else can we address these moments of confusion and doubt? Well, I believe many times just like there can be a call to do something, there can also be a call not to do something. Looking back again at David's life, we see that, while he was on the run, David had two separate opportunities to kill Saul himself. Once in a cave, in 1 Samuel 24, and again in 1 Samuel 26, when David snuck into Saul's camp while he was sleeping. However, in both cases, and despite being encouraged by his advisors, David opted not to kill Saul. Remember that, up to this point, David has been a good and faithful servant to Saul. David never did anything to harm or hurt Saul. Yet, despite this, Saul is still hunting David to kill him. You would think that, of anyone, David has the most right to take the life of Saul. Furthermore, who typically gets to assume a throne when the King is assassinated? Typically, it's the person who assassinates or gives the order to assassinate. That means, if David follows through in either of these cases, he could most likely assume the throne God has been promising him. However, David recognized

that God's way was better than his way. So, David, again, trusted God and was patient for God to fulfill the promise in God's way.

But what happens when we don't have patience, or we don't trust God? Instead, we decide to take matters into our own hands. What happens then?

This is what makes the Bible so wonderful, it records the lives and experiences of many people who followed God. So to answer my question, now I want to go back to the book of Genesis. I want to look at Abram and Sarai in Genesis 16:

***"<sup>2</sup> Now Sarai said to Abram, 'Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.'**"*

Notice what she says: ***"the LORD has prevented me . . ."*** And ***"it may be that . . ."*** Can you hear the doubt in her voice? Can you see that Sarai is focused on her circumstance? She's old and past the age of childbearing. She begins to doubt what the Lord has promised and, ultimately, decides on her own that perhaps God really meant that is supposed to let Abram have children with her servant. In her doubt, she looks for any way to bring about the joy that she and Abram both long for. Now, to be fair, Abram appears to have just as much doubt as her, because as we are about to see in the coming verses, Abram goes along with her suggestion:

***"And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. <sup>3</sup> So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived."***

So far, the plan is working. Let's see what happens next:

***"<sup>4</sup> And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. <sup>5</sup> And Sarai said to Abram, 'May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!' <sup>6</sup> But Abram said to Sarai, 'Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please.' Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her."***

As you can see, things didn't end the way any of them thought, did it? What they thought might bring joy and comfort ended up only bringing further frustration, grief and distrust. You see, many times when we are tempted to take matters into our own hands, it starts with a thought, if our way gets us what we want, then surely it will be good. But what ultimately ends up happening is we find ourselves lost and confused even more so on the other side. What we thought was going to bring us fulfillment and joy really doesn't. God has a plan. Here is a reason for the ways in which he does things. As scripture tells us in Jeremiah 29:11:

***"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future."***

The beautiful thing about that verse, it's given while the nation of Israel is being carried off into captivity. It comes at a time where the people of Israel are confused, disappointed and fearful. God has a plan to prosper you. Maybe today, He's calling you to be still and wait upon him.

I have talked a lot about our confusion, our frustration, and even our doubt this morning. Like me, many of you have probably been, or currently are, in a place where you can relate with Sarai. Or you can relate with the Apostles. Well, here's the good news this morning. While our expectations may have differed from God, we know God will be faithful. We know that God fulfills his promise. David became king and ruled for 40 years. Sarai and Abram, after trying to take matters into their own hands, God had mercy on them. In fact, if you read in Genesis 17, you will see that God reaffirms his covenant with them and changes their names to affirm his covenant. Even Peter, who denied Christ three times, was promised to be the rock on which Christ's church was built. Further yet, God has already fulfilled the greatest promise ever told. We know that when we return here next Sunday, we are coming to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Who through him, we have the promise of eternal life with Him. No matter where you are this morning and no matter what you've done or tried to do, God is faithful to his promises. You can trust him to follow through.

After four months of trying to sell our house, Olivia and I were tired. We were ready to give up. In fact, we had told our realtor that if our house was not sold by the end of the fifth month, we were going to take it off the market. So, we waited. One week went by, nothing. Two weeks went by, nothing. Three weeks, nothing. Two days before we were planning to take the house off the market, our realtor calls. Someone wants to see the house. The next day, another call. The same family loved the house. They want to look at it again. The night before we were going to take the house off the market, an offer was put on the house. But it didn't stop there. You see, the one desire we had for our house was for the people who bought it to love it, to appreciate it. This was the house we brought our baby girl Jane home from the hospital to. This was the house that we had done ministry in over the past five years. We wanted God to continue to use this house. And He did it, with the new couple who bought the house.

Let me say it again. Even when it doesn't seem like it, our God is faithful. Our God keeps his promises. If you are here today, and you have never known him, His greatest promise is waiting for you. He loves you and wants to redeem you. He only asks that you come.

Pray with me.