

Introduction

I begin by with two power point slides. The first shows how a hamburger is "**advertised**" in contrast to "**reality.**" It's titled "**Disappointment.**" The second pictures a forlorn looking infant who was "**expecting something**" that "**just didn't happen.**" It's also titled "**Disappointment.**" Disappointment is the frustration or dissatisfaction we feel when some person or thing fails to meet our expectations. We all know what it is by experience. We've been disappointed many times before and will be many times again before we die.

But there is one who will never disappoint us, who will never fail to meet our expectations. That one is Jesus and that's what I'm going to preach about today – the great expectations we can have of Him.

Disappointed in Jesus

I begin with an observation. Professing Christians today express a great deal of disappointment with Jesus. I think of Philip Yancey's book *Disappointment with God* or Jerry Marshall's book *The Oracle of Malachi: The Danger of Being Disappointed with God*. As one author notes, disappointment books like those "**form a subcategory of Christian publishing.**" They reflect a reality with which we must come to grips. Many, if not most, professing Christians are disappointed in their walk with Jesus. Their inner psychological lives and their outer behavioral lives are less than they expected them to be.

George Perdikis is a classic example of this. Perdikis is the founder of one of Christian rock's most popular bands, Newsboys. In 2007, he renounced his Christianity and declared himself an atheist. Not long ago, he blogged for an atheist website and wrote: "**I always felt uncomfortable with the strict rules imposed by Christianity and yet most of the attention I received was focused on how well I maintained the impossible standards of religion.**" He went on to comment about the current members of Newsboys: "**They should**

acknowledge that they're struggling as much as anyone else."

Notice that comment of his, "**struggling as much as anyone else.**"

The truth is many if not most professing Christians view and experience following Jesus that way. Many have stated to me outright or implied it's a struggle. They aren't getting from it what they expected. So they're disappointed with Jesus, as Browns fans are with Johnny Manziel. That's the kind of disappointment I'm talking about here.

The Problem Isn't with Jesus

So what's the problem? Why are professing Christians' great expectations in their walk with Jesus not being met?

You all know what a "**lemon**" is, metaphorically. It's a car or some other consumer good that is defective. There's something wrong with its nature so that it doesn't do what it's supposed to do.

That reveals, by way of analogy, one possible reason that their walk with Jesus isn't meeting the great expectations of professing Christians. It's His nature. He's a lemon. He's just an historical figure who lived 2000 years ago. He can't impact us any more than any dead historical figure can. Or if He's more than that, He isn't much more than that. He's a phantom or fairy tale like figure who dwells on the margins of real life, hardly affecting it, or us, at all. His teachings reflect that. They sound good. They inspire and challenge us. But they're out of touch with reality. They don't work in the real world of day-to-day life. Jesus, therefore, is the problem. He and His teachings aren't able to produce the kind of person and life professing Christians expect.

But Jesus isn't the problem. On the contrary, He is "**Maestro**," as one author says it. That means He has absolute *cognitive* mastery over all of reality. According to Colossians 2:4, "**in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**" He is utterly smart. That He's Maestro also means He has absolute *practical* mastery over all of reality. According to Colossians 1:16-17, He invented, created, sustains, governs, and controls the universe and everything in it. It's true. He's Maestro

and His teachings reflect that. They're the best possible information about the most important matters in life. I'd sum it up this way. Jesus Himself is ultimate reality and His words the most vital information about reality. The problem of disappointment doesn't lie with Him.

The Parable

Where does it lie then? Our text, which is a parable, tells us. Remember how we interpret a parable. First, we examine its context. Second, we identify its points of reference, the details in it that represent something else. And third, we determine what the points of reference represent. Let's interpret this parable that way.

Luke 14 recounts that Jesus and other invited guests ate dinner at the home of a leading Pharisee. In verse 15, one of the guests declared, **"Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God,"** prompting Jesus to tell the parable that our text records. That's the context, which enables us now to identify the points of reference and determine what they represent.

One point of reference is the **"man"** as Jesus calls Him in verse 16. He represents God.

A second point of reference is the **"big dinner"** (verse 16) that this man gave. It would make the Kentucky Fried Chicken buffet look measly I'm sure. The context reveals that it represents life in the kingdom of God. Jesus had preached that the kingdom of God is at hand (Matthew 4:17). That was in fact His central message. He had also preached in the Sermon on the Mount what life in that kingdom looks like (Matthew 5-7). What does it look like? One author explains it well. It's a life of **"abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God's overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, (and) power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil."** That's life in the kingdom of God, abundant life as Jesus called it, and what the big dinner represents.

A third point of reference is the man **“inviting many”** (verse 16) to his **“big dinner.”** He doing so represents that life in the kingdom of God is **“at hand.”** It can be accessed right here, right now, on earth.

A fourth point of reference is the three groups of people, in verses 17, 21, and 23, that the man invited to his big dinner. Those invitees represent that life in the kingdom of God is available to all.

We now know the simple message of the parable. Life in the kingdom of God is like a big dinner. It’s a life of abundance, a continual feast so to speak. That life is available through Jesus to everyone no matter who or where they are, including you and me.

The Problem is with Them

But we have to take it. Notice a fifth point of reference, the response of the first invitees. They made lame **“excuses”** in verses 18-20: buying a piece of land, buying oxen, and being married. They had what they thought were more other important things to do and didn’t attend the man’s big dinner.

That point of reference represents how most people respond to Jesus and the kingdom life He offers. They have what they think are other more important things to do. They’re distracted by those things and never get around to what Jesus and kingdom life require.

That’s especially true in America today. Consider two realities. One is what philosopher Aldous Huxley called **“man’s almost infinite appetite for distractions.”** People crave distractions as they crave food. The other reality is America’s popular culture, which is what Kenneth Myers called, **“a culture of diversion.”** By its very nature, it offers far more distractions than any culture in human history ever has: playing video games, watching television shows, playing sports, watching sports, texting, watching 24 hour news, listening to downloaded music, talking on cell phones, keeping up to date on Face Book, and on it goes. Those two realities, in combination, are a double whammy for professing Christians. They make their walk with Jesus a distracted one.

That's a problem though and Dallas Willard explains why. Referring to our walk with Jesus, He writes: **"It too is not meant to run on just anything you may give it. If it doesn't work at all, or only in fits and starts, that is because we do not give ourselves to it in a way that allows our lives to be taken over by it."** An analogy explains this. A woman bought a new car and it wasn't right. It was running **"funny."** So she took it to the dealer and complained that he had sold her a lemon. After some questioning though, the dealer realized what was wrong. It was a diesel car but she had been putting regular fuel into it. The problem wasn't the car itself. It wasn't a lemon. The problem was the woman's interaction with it. She acted inconsistently with its nature. It wasn't built to work under the conditions she imposed on it.

It's like that with Jesus. His nature requires that we give ourselves to Him in a way that allows our lives to be taken over by Him, which is why so many professing Christians are disappointed with Him. Their response to Him is a distracted one. They have what they think are other more important things to do. But that response is inconsistent with His nature as Maestro. It's like putting regular fuel in a diesel car. It prevents Him from taking over their lives. Their walk with Him, as a result, doesn't work or works in fits and starts. They don't get from it what they expected and blame Him. He's a lemon, they think. In the final analysis, they're disappointed *with* Jesus because they're distracted *from* Jesus. The problem isn't with Him. It's with them.

The Solution to the Problem

For our walk with Jesus to achieve what we expect, we must give ourselves to Him in a way that's consistent with His nature as Maestro. The sixth point of reference in our parable reveals what that way is. That point of reference is the implied response of the second and third groups of invitees in verse 22. As far as they were concerned, there wasn't anything else as important as his dinner was. So they **"dropped everything"** and eagerly attended it.

That reveals how we give ourselves Jesus in a way that's consistent with His nature. We make and carry out the decision to be focused, not distracted, in our day-to-day lives – Jesus-focused.

We begin with a firm conviction. I read an article that listed the most important contemporary figures of our world. They included Barak Obama, Bill Gates, Vladimir Putin, and Stephen Hawking to name a few. But the most important contemporary figure, by far, wasn't even mentioned. I'm talking about Jesus. He is our contemporary. Maestro, the ultimate reality, is present in this world and with you and me, 24 hours a day. He literally never leaves our side.

Knowing that, we think and act in our day-to-day existence as if it is so. Suppose you're going to spend this afternoon with the President of the United States, just him and you. He'd be the focus of your attention wouldn't he? It's like that with Jesus. Knowing that He's ultimate reality and that He's present with us, we make Him the focus of our day-to-day lives. We unceasingly act upon and interact with Him. We perceive and interpret everything in terms of Him. We take Him and His words primarily into account in everything we decide and do. Nothing, including jobs, spouses, and children, distracts us from doing that.

That response is consistent with Jesus' nature as Maestro. Because it is, it allows Him to take over our lives. Our walk with Him, as a result, doesn't just meet our great expectations. It exceeds them.

Conclusion

In two weeks, I'm going to explain in practical detail how to be Jesus-focused. But until then, I'll leave you with this thought in closing. "**Great expectations**" was a 19th century code that meant "**going to inherit money,**" which explains the title of Charles Dickens' acclaimed novel *Great Expectations*. But you and I in our walk with Jesus can have great expectations of something far more valuable than money. I'm talking about abundant life. Let's act consistently with His nature and be Jesus-focused. Our great expectations will certainly be met if we do.