

WHEN GOD DISAPPOINTS YOU

SERIES: LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS



Catalog No.20250413
Matthew 21:9:
3rd Message
Paul Taylor
April 13, 2025

I'd like to start with an exercise to illustrate some of the ideas we'll be talking about today. For that, I need a volunteer.

I want to give you a gift. Here's your gift. It might not be a gift that you want. And this kind of a gift requires something of you. You have to do something because you have received this gift. You may be regretting your decision to volunteer this morning. Or maybe you're thrilled. It could go either way with a gift like this. This is not a gift: it's a commitment.

This morning we are finishing up our Lenten series on the topic of disappointment. Two weeks ago, Rolana began our time by thinking through those times when we felt disappointed by community. Last week Dan talked about being disappointed with ourselves. All I can say is that I sincerely hope you have been appropriately disappointed in this series. I hope to continue that disappointment today.

We'll be talking about disappointment with God. What do we do when things in life don't go the way we want them to? What do we do when we feel mistreated by God? Or worse: forgotten? How do we process the inevitable disappointment that we will feel toward God? It's inevitable, not because God is inherently disappointing, but because we are always going to have false expectations.

My suggestion is that disappointment with God is a gift. It's the kind of gift that someone received this morning. It's not the kind of gift that we want to receive. It requires something of us. It could easily lead to something dying if we don't take the right steps.

To talk about this gift of disappointment, we'll be tracking some events during Holy Week. Our main focus will be on the event that we celebrate today: the so-called triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Palm branches and shouts of "Hosanna" welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem. We'll begin our discussion there.

But we're going to end our discussion with a different kind of crowd carrying something different in their hands. We'll see Jesus arrested at night in an isolated

garden.

We want to notice the lifecycle of disappointment with God. Instead of just asking what to do when we feel disappointed with God, we're going to go back to the beginning to understand where it comes from. We want to see how it takes root. We will find out why it is so hard to process. But ultimately we will recognize that disappointment presents us with a choice. That's the gift. And depending on our response, disappointment can be the pathway toward a much deeper relationship with Christ.

The process begins with expectation. Next, there is often an initial affirmation of what we expect. Then, the disappointment hits when the bottom falls out. Finally, there is our response. Expectation - Initial Affirmation - Disappointment - Response.

Our guide through this process will be Judas -- one of Jesus' disciples. He faced a significant disappointment with God. We're going to try to understand what he might have felt as part of that process. That will give us some insight into his response. And once we see that, we'll see the kind of risks that disappointment leads to, as well as the opportunities.

Let's walk for a few minutes in the shoes of Judas and see what we discover.

Expectation

The story begins when Jesus and his companions approach Jerusalem.

Matthew 21:1-5

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, you

shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, 5 "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt,[a] the foal of a beast of burden.'"

Everything about this scene screams one word: "King!" All the details of how Jesus entered Jerusalem are carefully arranged so that a very clear message is given. Jesus is entering Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives and retracing the steps of King David from the Old Testament. It's the first time in the New Testament we see Jesus ever ride an animal. He usually walks everywhere, but kings ride on animals. He has this air of mystery about him as if things have been pre-arranged: "If anyone says anything to you." And then there's the quotation from Zechariah to seal the deal: "See, your king comes to you!"

All the pieces work together so that anyone who was watching this scene or reading about it later could only conclude that Jesus was claiming for himself to be the coming King of Israel. In doing this, Jesus was creating a set of expectations in all the people around him. None of this was accidental. He was signaling something that everyone would have recognized.

Was Jesus promising something he didn't plan on delivering?

When our kids were little, sometimes we'd be talking about things as a family and I'd ask the kids "Do you want to go to Disneyland?" This always made my wife upset, and probably for good reason. I had no intention of taking my children to Disneyland. I just wanted to know if they had a desire to go. She claimed that I was setting them up. My perspective was that I was only seeking information, and if they drew a conclusion about my intentions, then that was on them. I usually lost that argument.

Let's think about Judas as one of those disciples who was entering Jerusalem with Jesus. He had traveled with Jesus for three years. He was the treasurer of the group. They trusted him. He must have seen God provide for their needs in miraculous ways. Much of Jesus' ministry was funded by women who made his ministry possible. What kinds of provision had he witnessed?

Imagine what he might be thinking during this setup. Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey in reference to a

prophecy about a coming King. Judas must have been excited. He must have had expectations for what kind of a king Jesus would be.

What I find amazing is that Jesus invites his followers into this kind of false expectation. He knows that they are misunderstanding the situation before them. He knows that even though he has openly spoken of his arrest and execution, they can't fathom it. But he leads them, knowing that this is the only path toward truly understanding what he has come to do.

The actual quote he chooses from Zechariah gives hints that Jesus would be a different kind of a king. He would be a king who sacrifices. But no one seems to have picked up on this. Maybe the only way to truly break us of our false expectations is not to correct them, but to disappoint them. Let's keep reading to see what happens.

Affirmation

The tricky thing about expectations is that once we form them, we often have some experiences that initially reinforce those expectations. After Jesus sets up the scene for him to enter Jerusalem, the way it plays out only affirms the expectations that people would have had.

Matthew 21:6-9

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. 8 Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

Most of what is happening here is a reference to Psalm 118. The people spreading their cloaks, the branches from the trees, the joy and enthusiasm of the crowd. All of that is drawn from this Psalm that speaks of the King saving Israel.

The quoted part is a direct quote from the Psalm. The only place that the word "Hosanna" appears in the New Testament is here in the story of the triumphal entry. The word itself is fascinating. If you go back to Psalm 118, you'll see that verse 25 says "Save us, we pray, O LORD." The word "Hosanna" is simply the Hebrew sound for "Save us".

When people shout "Hosanna to the Son of David," they are using what's called a loan word. It's a word from another language that you don't translate; you just use it as is. If you've ever been to France, you can walk into a café and order a "hamburger." They don't translate the English word; they just use it as is.

So, these people are literally saying to Jesus, "Save us." It's a cry of praise and worship with a built-in expectation that this is the one who will save them.

What are they asking for salvation from? From what do they want to be saved? You cry "Hosanna" to the one who will deliver you from your greatest problems. What were the problems for this crowd in the first century? What was in their minds when they cried Hosanna to a King riding on a donkey into the Holy City of Jerusalem?

It's most likely that they wanted salvation from the kinds of things that bother us. They wanted political freedom from the Romans. They wanted economic stability. They wanted health and joy and happiness. Like all of us, they wanted life to go well.

I'd like to invite you to say these words, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Let's repeat them together. As you say them, pick something in your mind that you are asking for salvation from. I won't ask you to share: it's between you and God. Let's say together, and let's be asking for something. "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

Several years ago, I faced a deep struggle with anxiety and depression. I didn't feel like myself. Most days, I had a heaviness in my chest that I couldn't shake, no matter what I did. At one point during that time, we preached through the Sermon on the Mount, and I memorized it as part of my preparation. For a long time, every morning, I would pray the words, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall be comforted."

I held onto those words because I was poor in spirit.

Think again about Judas. He is in the midst of this crowd. He is crying Hosanna to Jesus. What is he asking for? What is he expecting? How is this situation affirming his expectations?

Once again, it seems as if Jesus allows the situation to affirm Judas' false expectations. He doesn't stop and say, "Hey, I think you're probably misunderstanding the situation here. You probably think I'm going to save you from the Romans and make your life smooth. But I'm a different kind of king. I'm going to save you spiritually

and give you eternal life. I just want to make sure you understand so you don't get disappointed when they nail me to a cross."

People often talk about tempering your expectations so you won't get disappointed. But I wonder if disappointment might be a necessary step for many of us. Maybe we need to walk through it. Maybe the choice that disappointment gives us is an important one.

As we keep reading, we'll see Judas face a choice after a devastating kind of disappointment.

Disappointment

We don't know too much about why Judas decided to betray Jesus. We aren't given a window into his thoughts. But we do have some clues in the way the story is told, which lead to a few conclusions. In particular, Matthew tells the story by putting the scene we're about to read just before Judas' conversation with the chief priests about betraying Jesus.

Other gospels have these events in a different order. The implication is that Matthew wants to draw a thematic connection between these events rather than a chronological one.

Matthew 26:6-10

Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper,^[a] 7 a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. 8 And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? 9 For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor." 10 But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me.

Notice a few details about this story. Jesus is back in Bethany, outside the city walls of Jerusalem. It has presumably been a few days since Jesus came into the city and things haven't happened in the way that Judas might have expected them to happen. Now this woman comes up to Jesus and does something that on the surface makes no sense at all. She wastes something valuable. This was the last straw for Judas.

We have an event that makes no sense. A waste of resources. And a Savior who seems intent on dying

rather than reigning. The way Matthew tells the story, in the very next verses Judas goes to the chief priests.

Many of us can relate to the kinds of things Judas might have been feeling. We usually tend to ask why when disappointment strikes. Why would God allow his? Why me? Why now? There's also a sense of being let down. I thought this good thing was going to happen and now it's not. But on top of that, there's a sense of dread. This bad thing that wasn't supposed to happen is happening. How do I stop it?

And there's clearly a cost to all of this. The disciples have linked their lives to Jesus. If he is going to die, what are they doing to do? Will the last three years all have been for nothing? What will they do?

I hope we can see how all of these elements combined into a devastation for Judas. So much disappointment. So many expectations crushed by the force of reality. The future is ambiguous. Jesus seems to have failed on what he promised. What do you do with all that disappointment?

I grew up listening to the music of Steven Curtis Chapman. He was one of the most popular Christian artists of the 1990s. He's still making great music today. But in 1990 he recorded a song called "No better place." The lyrics claimed that there was "No better place on earth // than the road that leads to heaven."

I remember singing that song with my youth group at the top of my lungs. It sounded like this... Just kidding, I won't sing it for you.

We were convinced that this Christian life was the best way to live. There really was no better place on earth.

In 2008, Steven Curtis Chapman suffered an unimaginable family tragedy. His 5-year-old daughter was killed when his 17-year-old struck her with the family SUV in the driveway. Can you even imagine the layers of disappointment? The ways that he must have thought life was going to unfold. The good things that would never come about. The pain that he never imagined he would have to deal with. The confusion. The pain.

How do you deal with that kind of disappointment? How do you face it?

Think about a disappointment you have faced. A job. A health situation. A relationship. It's not hard to come

up with something. We have all been disappointed.

Psalm 13:1

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

What do we do when we find ourselves in that moment — when we feel like all of our expectations have been shattered? How do we process that level of disappointment with God?

Response

This is the point in the story we've been waiting for. What started with expectation and increased with some initial affirmation has crashed down into disappointment. Here's the turning point. What will the response be?

We already know what the response was for Judas

Matthew 26:14-16

Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15 and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. 16 And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

Can you hear the disappointment in his voice? "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" Can you hear the three years of expectation and faith and trust that has come crashing down? Judas has made his choice. He has responded to disappointment by turning his back on Jesus.

Matthew 26:47

While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.

Instead of palm branches and cloaks, this crowd has swords and clubs. Instead of shouting hosanna, they are whispering instructions to catch Jesus at night.

Judas does what many of us do with our disappointment. We attack the source.

What we once looked to for salvation, we turn against and regard as an enemy. Our hope turns into hate. Our expectation sours to vengeance.

That response reveals to us what was going on all along. It shows us that our expectations were misplaced. It reveals a kind of idolatry and turns into something dark in the face of disappointment.

For us, this is the key moment. What will we do in this place? Will we hold onto our expectations and attack the God who failed to meet them? Or will we allow our disappointment to reshape our hearts? Will we let the disappointment kill something within us and trust that God can bring it back to life?

It makes sense that our first instinct would be to walk away from God in the face of disappointment. This is how the world works. This is how most of our life works. If you walk up to a vending machine and it eats your money without giving you something, will you keep feeding money into it? If you buy a car from a dealership that turns out to be a piece of junk, will you go back to that dealership for a replacement? If your friend borrows money and never pays it back, will you keep lending to them?

We learn to turn away from the kinds of things that don't meet our expectations. That's good. It's what growing up is all about. But the difference is that God is not a vending machine. God is not a car dealership. God is not a human friend.

God is bigger. That's the turn of faith: to believe that God is different from anything in this world, to trust the one who brings life out of death, to walk faithfully into what seems like death, knowing that there is something good on the other side of the pain of disappointment.

That's what Steven Curtis Chapman has done. It's not that the pain of his tragedy has gone away. But he has chosen to keep embracing the eternal God even in the midst of that pain.

Here's what he says about it:

Because I believe my story is not over. ... I must trust that I cannot yet see the whole picture. That's why it's called faith. ... Even at the risk of being a fool, I have nothing else to hold on to.

That's the other choice: the one Judas didn't make. In the end, Judas regretted his decision. And we have the benefit of his story to warn us against making the same

mistake that he did.

This is the gift of disappointment. The gift that requires something of you. And this gift requires much more than a beta in a fishbowl. The gift of disappointment requires you to trust the God we know is good. This gift invites us to discover something bigger than our expectations. And isn't that what we want, after all?

How could we have ever thought that our expectations were the good thing? We can't possibly expect what's best for us -- our perspective is way too limited. We have to be surprised by what God provides. And in order to be surprised, we have to be disappointed.

That's the opportunity. Walk through your disappointment. Walk through the darkness. Support each other as we do so. And trust that on the other side, maybe far on the other side, is new life, redemption and healing.

Conclusion

Let's go back to the fish named "Disappointment." It's the kind of gift you don't think you want to receive. And if you don't do anything to that fish, it will die and start to stink. That's what happens when Disappointment isn't well cared for.

But if you care for it, you could have a very different experience. This is probably where the analogy breaks down. Even a well cared for beta fish won't change your life. But walking through seasons of disappointment with the Lord can be transformative. Those are the experiences which turn a belief in Jesus into a deep faith in the power of Christ.

Don't miss out on the opportunity that disappointment can be. Allow God to redeem it and reshape you in the process. And once you've gone through it, be prepared for the next round. This isn't a one-time process; it's something God does repeatedly in our lives.

God is good. He has our best in mind. He will work in our life. But it will almost always involve seasons of disappointment. Trust him through those seasons and you'll find resurrection life on the other side.

Endnotes

1. William Kerns, "Chapman Includes Painful Death of Daughter in His Late 2016 Memoir," Lubbock Avalanche-Journal, March 19, 2017, <https://www.lubbockonline.com/story/entertainment/local/2017/03/19/chapman-includes-painful-death-daughter-his-late-2016-memoir/14869379007/>.