

SEQUOYAH HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Food for the Road: Underneath Hope”

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Mark 8:28-9:1

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I'm going to give you a definition, and you see if you can guess what word it is. Are you up for the challenge? The transitive verb definition is **“to desire with expectation of obtainment or fulfillment.”** (repeat) **Put another way, in the noun: “desire accompanied by expectation of obtaining what is desired or belief that it is obtainable.”** Can you guess what word this is? The answer is **“hope”** according to Merriam Webster's Dictionary. A very positive word, don't you think?

Today's sermon approach will be a little different as I want to walk us through this passage and look at the theme of hope while also noticing a subcurrent that is flowing underneath that hope. What is really happening when we hope for something or have hopes for someone?

Read Mark 8:27-28. Let's begin with the first two verses, *Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”* Who do **PEOPLE** say that I am? It's a way of asking what are people hoping for now? Jesus had healed, fed, and taught throughout Galilee and beyond, so the people naturally began to hope for what he might do next. So, the hope of the people becomes clear, in effect saying, “they say you're John the Baptist perhaps because you tell of the kingdom of God and preach a gospel of repentance and forgiveness. They say you're Elijah perhaps because you work amazing signs and wonders. They say you're a prophet perhaps because you have a proclamation to make on behalf of God.”

All of these are the **hopes of the people**. Desires that come with EXPECTATIONS of obtainment or fulfillment. Preach, teach, heal, feed, repeat.

[Read Mark 8:28-33] *He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”* [The Word of the Lord].

‘Who do YOU say that I am’ is Jesus’ way of asking not “what are your hopes of me?” but rather, “what are your **expectations** of me?” I saw Andy Stanly preach on marriage one time, and he said that when a man and a woman are betrothed to be married, they each come with their HOPES of what they desire out of the marriage: I want a house, a family with 2 kids, 2 golden retrievers, an epoxied garage turned into a shop AMEN? Then Andy highlighted how one spouse’s HOPES quickly become the other spouse’s EXPECTATIONS that he or she must now try to live up to. Do you see that? Your desire for a home is now my expectation to provide enough to give you that home. My desire for 2 kids is now your expectation to provide two children. Have you ever experienced that before? Here’s how you’ll know if you’ve ever had expectations of others before: ladies have you’ve ever said, “**he should have known to...**” or fellas, “**she should have done...**” We’ve all had hopes that were *secretly attached* to our own expectations of what others **should** do, or how they **should** have done something; “**the sanctuary elevator should have been done weeks ago.**”

How many times did people come to Jesus with hopes, no, hidden EXPECTATIONS that they would be healed, that they would be fed, and Jesus **still did it anyway**? And now, since we know Jesus is the anointed one of God, the Messiah, what hopes, no, what expectations have the disciples placed on Jesus? Because the title of Messiah comes with many loaded preconceived notions and expectations of what a Messiah should do, namely expecting a supreme display of supernatural victory over the earth and the forces of evil or anything else that Daniel 7 may conjure in one’s mind concerning the Son of Man.

I’m not knocking hope here or expectations for that matter, hope is a fantastic biblical principle when rooted in the patient waiting for **God to do as God has promised according to God’s character**. Expectations are a helpful thing too. They clarify what is to be done. Clear expectations benefit employers and employees; they benefit teachers and their students. Clear expectations benefit friendships, marriages, churches and contractors alike, and all relationships. BUT how many times do **we lead with our HOPES** while never clearly voicing our expectations? *Bingo* Yet what does Jesus do as soon as Peter declares him, Messiah? **He leads with clear expectations of what the Messiah must do first, before he can do the cloud riding:** *Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again.* Peter took issue with this because Jesus’ clear expectations did not align with Peter’s hopes.

Thanksgiving is one of those days where we say we’re *hoping* for a great holiday—but most of us aren’t hoping...we’re **secretly expecting**. We say, “*I hope everyone gets along,*” but what we mean is, “*No arguments today.*” We say, “*I hope dinner turns out well,*” but we mean, “*Everything needs to be perfect.*” We say, “*I hope the family photo looks good,*” but we mean, “*Everyone better smile and cooperate because this is going to be our Christmas card!*”

We call these *hopes*—but the moment someone shows up late, or a conversation gets tense, or the turkey is too dry, or the kids melt down, something inside us goes, “*This is not how today was supposed to go.*” And just like that, the truth comes out: it wasn’t just hope—**there was a hidden expectation underneath it.**

That’s exactly what happens with Peter. He “hopes” Jesus is the Messiah...but he’s also carrying a whole script for what the Messiah must do—and when Jesus doesn’t follow the script, Peter reacts. This Thanksgiving might expose your hidden expectations. **So will Jesus.** Not to shame us, but to teach us to follow *His* script, not ours.

What hopes do we have for Jesus in our lives? No, let’s be clear, what hidden expectations do we have of Jesus in our lives? Do we find ourselves like Peter: wanting to win *without* dying, to reign *without* serving, to conquer *without* suffering? To follow Jesus *without* ever leaving the recliner while the game is on? The “human things” we set our minds on begin with our human hopes, that turn into our human expectations, to be placed on the Son of God, to be placed on the Living God, to be placed on our spouse, our children young or grown, our co-workers, our family and friends. What HIDDEN expectations are you carrying right now under the guise of hope?

Instead, Jesus leads with clear expectations **first**, and THEN HOPES that **we will faithfully follow.** [Read Mark 8:34-9:1] *He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, “If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.”* [The Word of the Lord].

Do you hear the difference? Jesus doesn’t hope for followers while holding a hidden expectation that they will lose their life for his sake. He boldly and clearly sets the expectation: *if any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves...* It’s like speaking up with quiet conviction when a coworker or student mocks someone for their faith, knowing full well the jokes may turn toward *you* next. Denying yourself means **absorbing that discomfort** rather than hiding what’s true. It’s **choosing loyalty to Jesus even when it costs you social ease** or approval.

Have you been faithfully following Jesus’ expectations set before you, or have you been hoping he’ll follow yours? I have faith in Jesus, **so I should** have my prayers answered the way I want them. I have faith in Jesus, **so I should** get into the college I want, **I should** get the job I

want, or my marriage **should look like...**, or **I should** be healed from...I should, I should, I should...

No, he's been quite clear, to follow Jesus means that **we can expect** stepping into uncomfortable situations for the sake of the gospel. To follow Jesus means we go to contested territory for Jesus' sake, **and by the way**, did you know that Caesarea Phillipi was ground zero for pagan idol worship and sacrifices to a host of other deities? Which means Jesus isn't just **telling** the crowd the expectation; **he's demonstrating it** by marching them right into places that were believed to be the gates to the dead, or the gates of Hades. They were on a road far from Jerusalem, way up north, far from the Temple and everything familiar or comfortable because Jesus was **demonstrating the expectation** that the Messiah comes to **give his life** in service of the Father. The kingdom of God does come in power; it does reach every nook and cranny of the earth, and his followers will be the ones to take it there, come what may, even if it costs our lives. **Our hope then is not for Jesus to fit our expectations; it's for us to fit into His expectations.**

Peter hoped and expected to see the Son of Man coming in glory. If we're honest, that's still our hope and expectation today, isn't it? "*Come, Lord Jesus Come*" is often our refrain. Yet how compassionate is Jesus with this transitional statement to say that some will not taste death until they see the Kingdom of God has come in power? Compassionate because if you keep reading in Chapter 9, Peter does get a glimpse of what he expected from the Messiah, the transfigured Jesus in all his divine splendor and glory. As Jesus **still** healed, and **still** fed, despite the people's expectations of him, we see that he graciously gives Peter a glimpse of his own expectation and hope.

As we turn our hearts towards the season of Advent, may we sit with a Messiah who is very clear about his expectations for us: deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me. We also follow a Messiah who is great in love and compassion, that even when we burden him with our own expectations; he graciously and mercifully meets them at times. Let us be clear about the expectations our Messiah has for us. Let us be forthright in our expectations of others and do away with the secret scripts we have for others, and may we prioritize Jesus and the Kingdom of God instead. This world has numerous answers to who Jesus is, us included. Underneath our hopes are often hidden expectations, but Jesus meets us with clarity and grace, asking "*Who do you say that I am?*" **In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.**